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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
TIME, SPACE AND MEANING IN THE PLAYS OF GERTRUDE STEIN

by



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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1969

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read,
and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for
acceptance, a thesis entitled Time, Space and Meaning
in the Plays of Gertrude Stein submitted by Shirley C.
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the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

Most of Gertrude Stein's critical writings were an attempt to explain the theories which gave rise to her seemingly incomprehensible dramatic works. They are almost totally concerned with some aspect of space, time, and, consequently, identity. This, in conjunction with the form of the plays themselves, justifies us in regarding Stein's conceptions of time and space as the structural principles of her drama.

I will attempt to show how Stein applied her theory to her plays and how that theory and, consequently, the dramas themselves developed and changed. The emphasis throughout is on the plays, since explications of Stein's theories qua theories are numerous.

The early plays, exemplified by A Circular Play and Objects Lie On a Table, represent a cubist phase of Stein's playwriting. She is primarily concerned with the creation of an inclosed space in which objects are present. Time is virtually eliminated; it is the "continuous present." By the writing of Four Saints in Three Acts, Stein conceived of the play as landscape. The inclosed space was filled with shifting perspectives, depending upon the audience-writer-observer's position, and anything could be introduced into it.

After Four Saints in Three Acts, Stein showed

little theoretical development in her plays. Instead, they reveal an intensification and solidification of the techniques she had already chosen for herself. Listen To Me is a verbal landscape, a meditation on language, with grammar and syntax for its subject. The space is the space of words and the movement is the contacts between these words. In The Mother of Us All, Stein unites her theory of the play-as-landscape with specific and easily recognizable thematic material and so creates her most conventional play. She has, by this time, entrenched her techniques firmly within the other demands the theatre makes regarding character and content in a play, writing her most unified drama. .

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Time is the Present

A comprehensive study of the first half of the twentieth century would probably cite the interest of its artists and scholars in the nature of space and time. In literature, Eliot was "revivifying" the past associations of words and uniting them with the present word; he and James Joyce both made past, present and future indistinguishable by intermingling them in reveries; Joyce further created an inclosed space for the "stream-of-consciousness" novel with Finnegan's Wake. Proust, by means of a novel that recreated experiences out of memory, sought to "recapture" the past. Composers experimented with the destruction of time in syncopation and created a new "space of time" by making the duration of sound, as opposed to conventional musical "time," the structural unit of the composition. Artists, particularly the Cubists, sought to create on canvas space and its objects as they "saw" it, as it "seemed," not as they remembered it from tactile, kinetic and pragmatic experience. In philosophy, Samuel Alexander, William James, Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead all attempted to define space and time as it was experienced by the human mind. Working from the "objective" stance of the scientist, Albert Einstein populated space by

defining it in terms of objects perceived by an observer and made time relative to the experience of that same observer.

Common to all these people was the refusal to regard space and time as Absolutes. Those previously held Absolutes became subject to flux; they moved backward as well as forward and they could be contracted or expanded as perception, not as abstract, systematized Laws of Nature, dictated.

It is hardly surprising, in view of all these activities, that Gertrude Stein made the discovery of the nature of space, time and identity the structural unit of her fictional writings and the theoretical basis of her critical work. She asserted her own contemporaneity and implied her consequently undeniable position as an artist: "The business of Art . . . is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present."¹ This statement is more than an insistence on the artist's being contemporary; it embodies the principle of time which governs Stein's works. For her, the work of Art is written by the "human mind" in a sort of egoless engagement with itself and the world. When the "human mind" is writing, there is no connection with "human nature,"² or identity, on the part of the writer. Nor is there a differentiation of past and present. The past is not

remembered but is present only as it is a part of the individual, as it shapes his experience, in the present moment. At a different moment, the past, modified by intervening experiences, will be different. Thus Stein repeats to create a "continuous present"³ of the "human mind," maintaining that hers is a repetition different each time since it occurs at a different moment.

Gertrude Stein was employing these techniques and formulating her theory as early as the writing of Three Lives (completed in 1906). Writing of that work in Composition as Explanation (1926), she says: "A composition of a prolonged present is a natural composition in the world as it has been these thirty years it was more and more a prolonged present. I created then a prolonged present naturally. I knew nothing of a continuous present but it came naturally to me to make one. . . ." ⁴ In addition to Stein's own disclaimer, the early date of Three Lives precludes an influence on her work by most of her contemporaries. Her writing is more peculiar to herself than a theory of influences will admit. It resulted from her experiences and conversations far more often than from her reading.

I will attempt to show in this thesis how Gertrude Stein's concepts of the "continuous present" and her techniques of creating it changed in the course of her writings. To this end, I will consider five of her plays: Objects

Lie On a Table, A Circular Play, Four Saints in Three Acts, Listen to Me and The Mother of Us All. I have chosen plays as the medium best illustrating the development of her theories because, with the possible exception of the short portraits, the drama is the form she chose to write in most consistently. This seems to indicate that she felt the stage to be the best place to work out her twentieth-century concepts of space and time.

For Gertrude Stein, the problem of writing plays began with the difference between talking and listening. In Everybody's Autobiography, she writes:

My eyes always have told me more than my ears. Anything you hear gets to be a noise, but a thing you see, well of course it has some sound but not the sound of a noise.

A hoot owl is about the best sound. We hear it here a great deal.

But speaking voices always go at a different tempo than when you listen to them and that bothers me, things seen might too, but then you do not have to look at them, but things said have to be heard, and they always go on at the wrong tempo. . . .everybody hears too much with their ears and it never makes anything come together, something is always ahead of another or behind, it does not even make any bother but it does nothing either but make a noise and a noise is always a confusion, and if you are confused well if you look at anything you are really not confused but if you hear anything then you really are confused.⁵

If the noise of a hoot owl is "about the best sound," it is so because that sound is a pure expression; it exists, carrying no verbal meaning. But the meaning

of a speaker's words always tends to be out of time with the meaning of the listener's thoughts, particularly if those thoughts are, as Stein's, visually oriented. This becomes the first problem of the theatre. The actors are doing and speaking while the audience is watching and listening. Between the two there is a gap in time that creates the emotion of theatre-going:

The thing that is fundamental about plays is that the scene as depicted on the stage is more often than not one might say it is almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience.

What this says is this.

. . . your sensation I say your emotion concerning that play is always either behind or ahead of the play at which you are looking and to which you are listening.⁶

This that the thing seen and the thing felt about the thing seen not going on at the same tempo is what makes the being at the theatre something that makes anybody nervous.

.

In the first place at the theatre there is the curtain and the curtain already makes one feel that one is not going to have the same tempo as the thing that is there behind the curtain.

.

Nervousness consists in needing to go faster or to go slower so as to get together.⁷

Stein connects this difference between stage and audience time with the difference between speaking and listening time by thinking about the cinema. She comes to terms with her problem in a conversation with Chaplin: "He [Charlie Chaplin] said. . . he had known the silent films and in that they could do something that the theatre

had not done they could change the rhythm but if you had a voice accompanying naturally after that you could never change the rhythm you were always held by the rhythm that the voice gave them."⁸ Siegfried Kracauer writes that, when Chaplin began making sound films, he ridiculed the spoken word, using it abnormally to keep it separated from the visual.⁹ This is, in essence, a re-phrasing of Stein's technique. She keeps the visual and the aural in the word disconnected and creates emotion by that disconnectedness.

Now the function of the cinema, according to Kracauer, is the exploration of physical reality. He concludes from this that it is not the cinema's job to tell a story. Stein had much earlier made the same decision for playwriting. She wants to make "what happened"¹⁰ the drama; it must be the essence, not the story, of the play. Everything that is not a story becomes potential for a play, even numbers and advertisements. The result is the disappearance of what is usually regarded as "subject." With the possible exception of the very late plays, the experimental technique, the creation of a relative time and space, is the play and any attempt to assign it other subject matter will be thwarted by the play itself.

To turn back to the plays then, we will see how that technical "essence" changes as Stein comes to understand it. Objects Lie On a Table and A Circular Play are primarily cubist and spatial in concept; Four Saints in

Three Acts is a landscape that is a space containing temporal movement; Listen To Me creates a "continuous present" with reference only to the writer's tools, syntax and grammar; The Mother of Us All shapes the "continuous present" around historical characters and Steinian "narration," suffusing the play with emotion.

CHAPTER TWO

The Play as Inclosed Space or Painting:

A Circular Play and Objects Lie On a Table

Until about 1922, the elimination of narrative time is as far as Stein goes in the solution of the problem of plays. Thus in works like A Circular Play (1920) and Objects Lie On a Table a Play (1922) we get visual-aural disconnectedness or non-narrative as the informing principle. The plays are spatial, not temporal; they exist through their physical presence on the page or on the stage, not through a series of causally related events. Their movement is a movement of objects in relation, not a movement of sequential events or time. Stein says, "I came to think that since each one is that one and that there are a number of them each one being that one, the only way to express this thing each one being that one and there being a number of them knowing each other was in a play."¹ Sutherland² points out that the relationship of a "number of them knowing each other" does not necessarily lead to characterization of individuals. To avoid characterization, Stein often chooses not to name her speakers. They are "One" or a "Chorus." Often, as in A Circular Play, the lines are not assigned even this minimally; they appear with no name prefixed to them as speaker. Her "characters" thus escape identity; in terms

of The Geographical History of America they are the "human mind," not "human nature." Moreover, characterization implies development and change in time, whereas Stein is interested in "each one being that one" in a "continuous present." "Each one" remains the same, linking the play to dance rather than to narrative:

Two things are always the same the dance and war. One might say anything is the same but the dance and war are particularly the same because one can see them. That is what they are for that any one living then can look at them. And games do do both the dance and war bull-fighting and football playing, it is the dance and war anything anybody can see by looking is the dance and war. That is the reason that plays are that, they are the thing anybody can see by looking. Other things are what goes on without everybody seeing, that is why novels are not plays well anyway.³

The play is a visual pattern as opposed to a series of events; it occupies space, not time.

Stein's remark that "my middle writing was painting"⁴ follows naturally from a description of the play as space rather than time. More particularly, these plays are cubist paintings. Like the cubist works, they have a center that "is" and other perspectives move around that center, in relation to it. This is the operation of the "human mind":

The human mind knows this, that everything is there as it is.

Only the human mind knows this and that is the reason that it is not what anybody says but what anybody

writes that has to do what it has to do with the human mind.

. . .the human mind knows that it is what it is. It even knows that human nature is what it is therefore it need not remember or forget no the human mind does not remember because how can you remember when anything is what it is.⁵

The "human mind" creates a "continuous present," a spatial entity. It creates A Circular Play and Objects Lie On a Table, dramatic equivalents of cubist painting.

We can now return to the original problem of the play, the difference in time between speaking and listening. Since Stein's plays are spoken, this problem remains in her "dialogue." She expunges it with the description of how she writes dialogue: ". . .as I write the movement of the words spoken by some one whom lately I have been hearing sound like my writing feels to me as I am writing."⁶ Writing, Stein says, is the peculiar function of the "human mind" which can write only itself.⁷ It writes what "is" in the most disconnected sense. "When you look at anything and you do not see it all in one plane, you do not see it with the human mind. . . . The human mind has neither identity nor time and when it sees anything has to look flat."⁸ Spatially, writing becomes cubism. It tells what is really seen at the moment of looking, not what is remembered. Syntactically, it becomes relation, contact, not sequential meaning:

I found that any kind of a book if you read with glasses and somebody is cutting your hair and so you cannot

keep the glasses on and you use your glasses as a magnifying glass and so read word by word reading word by word makes the writing that is not anything be something.

Very regrettable but very true.

So that shows to you that a whole thing is not interesting because as a whole well as a whole there has to be remembering and forgetting, but one at a time, oh one at a time is something oh yes definitely something.⁹

. . . any minute is anything so then there is a human mind.

.
One and one makes two but not in minutes. No never again in minutes.

That is what ¹⁰is the human mind. There is nothing in it about minutes.

A Circular Play is an explicit development of a metaphor of space, since a circle is a defined space. But the circle or space is the play, not the action of it:

One does not run around in a circle to make a circular play.

Do not run around in a circle and make a circular play.

It is not necessary to run around in a circle to get ready to write a circular play. (144-145)¹¹

That would be action in the conventional sense of causally connected events. Instead, "The action of a circular play consists in reasonably enlarging doors" (148). To restate: a door is a space and the action, in Stein's sense of the word, consists of enlarging or putting more into a space. A Circular Play, therefore, will expand spaces; it will add perspectives to the object in the cubist painting.

"First in a circle" uses like sounds to enlarge the space. A review of the 1967 production of the play

shows how meanings cannot be attached to the lines:

The curtain rises. We listen to the words,
"Papa dozes. Mamma blows her noses."

An absurdist statement that we are trapped in
a bleak ugly universe? An Ionesco jab at the boredom
of bourgeois evenings-at-home? A post-Albee shriek
against the exacerbated bonds of the family structure?

It could be any one of these—until the next
lines:

"We cannot say this the other way. Exactly."

. . .there can be no more question. The feeling-
tone of the lines, far from the desolate agony of the
existentialist playwright, is cozy and self-congratu-
latory.¹²

The enlargement of space that occurs is in the aural
relationship of "dozes," "blows," and "noses." To
say it any other way would be to make a different rela-
tionship, a different movement, a different space. This
creation of spatial relationships by sound dominates the
play. In "Second in circles" the technique is used again:
"A citroen and a citizen/A miss and bliss" (139). Here
the explanation "We came together" is appended to tell us
that these sounds are juxtaposed to create a spatial rela-
tionship. Stein posits a difference between connectedness
and juxtaposition or contact in her work. Connectedness
implies a causal relationship and has no place in a play,
free as the latter must be from time and identity. Contact,
however, is a sign of the "human mind" writing "what is
is."¹³ "To understand a thing means to be in contact with
that thing and the human mind can be in contact with any-
thing."¹⁴ "A miss and bliss" are, therefore, not connected.

They are the "human mind" which writes, placing itself in contact with these things, "coming together" with them.

Subsequent lines continue the creation of movement and contact within a defined space:

Then suddenly there was an army.
 In my room.
 We asked them to go away
 We asked them very kindly to stay.
 How can Cailloux be dead again.
 Napoleon is dead.
 Not again.
 A morning celebration.
 And a surprising birthday.
 A room is full of odd bits of disturbing furniture. (139)

With the line "In my room" we get the creation of another space. The following lines, "We asked them to go away/We asked them very kindly to stay," create a sort of static movement. There is a spatial movement, a "going" and a "staying," but placed in relationship, the movements make a temporal stasis. The mention of Cailloux creates another such relationship with Napoleon. This time the contact is made by association, Cailloux and Napoleon having both been French premiers. Death is intimately related to space in the "human mind" according to Stein: ". . .if every one did not die there would be no room for those who live now. . . .the human mind can. . .know this."¹⁵ The return to an emphasis on space and disconnectedness is made with "A room is full of odd bits of disturbing furniture."

Contact can be made with a pun: "So are raisins./ We rise above it" (139). Once again we are led to the spatial relationship with the parenthetical insertion, "A circle is contained in there" (139). A lapse into the telling of events ("He is blocked by a driver" [140]) is stopped short with "I forget." The latter not only stops the time-oriented narration but reveals its failure to be of the "human mind" which can neither remember nor forget. With "thundering," "wondering," "blundering," the sounds once again turn in on themselves, coming into relation and creating an inclosed space. "Sorry" sees a return to the "sore" of several lines back ("sorry" from Old English "sarig," "sar," meaning "sore"), making another return or circle. Again this is followed by an authorial hint; after having made the circle, Stein asks, "How can I turn around" (140). A circular space is also a culmination, containing everything within it:

Two
One
Two won. (140)

The end of "Circle Hats" creates the etymological space we have already seen with "sore" and "sorry."¹⁶ Here the space is made by "star" and "stare" (Old English "stearra," "star," and "starian," "to gaze").¹⁷ "We were so sorry" (140) then recurs, giving us what are no longer

unique spaces but overlapping circles. These spaces overlap again in "Can you be sorry he went" (146).

With "Beauty in a circle," Stein provides us with a description of the pleasure to be gained from writing such a play: "A beauty is not suddenly in a circle. It comes with rapture. A great deal of beauty is rapture. A circle is a necessity. Otherwise you would see no one" (141). To begin with the end, "a circle is a necessity" because it is only by "beginning again and again"¹⁸ that Stein feels a "continuous present" can be written. And a "continuous present" is the only condition under which the "human mind," the writer of any masterpiece, exists.¹⁹ But this sort of logic is causal; causality involves time and so such reasoning cannot occur in the writing of the "human mind." Therefore we find the pun on circle, the movement to "otherwise you would see no one." Puns are not causally connected; they only bring two worlds into relation and, therefore, create movement in space, not time. The beauty of the "continuous present" is not "suddenly" there, Stein tells us. It cannot be, of course, for "suddenly" is a temporal concept having no role in the spatiality of Art. The beauty "comes with rapture," with ecstasy ("ex-stasis," "standing out") because "the human mind lives alone,"²⁰ not thinking, but being.

"The Circle" creates movement in space with the

homonyms "meat," "meet," and "flour," "flower." These words make contact in the same way that puns do. Similarly, synonyms such as "Calligraphy. Writing to a girl" (141) create a movement in space by virtue of relation rather than connectedness. Much of the emotion of that relation is established by the inexactitude of synonyms. But Stein also has more rigorous demands for a circle: "It was not a circle. Amelia and Susan were not scared" (141). Circles, or the space of plays, demand a unified, even if always unique, emotion. That unified emotion can be the unimpassioned disconnected consideration of every word by itself as it "is," but it must be there. This is followed by a return to overlapping circles, the contact of spaces. A dog "stares" and there is "star-light" (142), returning to the "star" of "Circle Hats" (140); "Circular saws" and "Circle sings" (142) are a beginning again of "cut wood cut wood" (140) which is onomatopoeic of the noise of the saw; "offering" links with "blessing" (142), making a new contact; the same occurs with "Oil well" and "Mrs. Wells" and "fish" and "line" (142).

"Consider a circle" embodies Gertrude Stein's theory about numbers:

In the car there are four three if you like and outside two, four if you like. Four necessarily more than. Two necessarily more than two.

Four if you like.
Expressly a circle. (143)

The Steinian element in the passage is the absence of the succession we feel to be inherent in numbers. Succession being temporal, it is precisely its absence which makes the passage "Expressly a circle." This non-successive quality of Stein's numbers lets her jumble them in act and scene headings, as she does in Four Saints in Three Acts, or replace them with the metaphorical descriptions of space we find in this play. Stein again provides her own justification for this practice:

There is no reason why chapters should succeed each other since nothing succeeds another. . . .

.

Every body knows just now how nothing succeeds anything. And so just now yes just now the human mind is the human mind.²¹

In Lectures in America Stein tells how, at about the time of A Circular Play, she began to write portraits which were an attempt to "get back to the essence of the thing contained within itself."²² They were another version of the inclosed space. She describes them:

All the looking was there the talking and listening was there but instead of giving what I was realizing at any and every moment of them and me until I was empty of them I made them contained within the thing I wrote that was them. The thing in itself folded itself up inside itself like you might fold a thing up to be another thing

which is that thing inside in that thing.

Do you see what I mean.

If you think how you fold things or make a boat or anything else out of paper or getting anything to be inside anything, the hole in the doughnut or the apple in the dumpling perhaps you will see what I mean.²³

We have seen how A Circular Play is a continuous attempt to make the play exist by and in itself, how each word and sentence is given a unique existence equal in importance to all the other existences filling the space of the play. In "Let us circle" we get a reference to the "hole in the doughnut" effect, confirming the existence of the play "inside itself": "An island is not round by much./Commence again to encircle water" (144). But the business of this play is also to "enlarge circles." Therefore, the image of the island is followed by the statement that:

A circle stretches. From San Francisco to the sun. From Tangier to the moon. From London to the water. From Bird to lessens. (144)

The circle or space of the play is infinitely extensible; it can include all that is, as witnessed by the next heading, "Can a circle enlist." This returns us to the opening of the play and ". . .an army./In my room" (139). By so returning us, it includes everything that has been in the play in between the two lines. This all-inclusiveness is reinforced by the question "Can a circle exist"

(144). That question leads us into the discussion of acting and writing a circular play which we looked at earlier and, from there, to the affirmation, "I gather in a circle" (145).

"Relieved for a circle" yields another of those comments that led Thornton Wilder to claim "metaphysics"²⁴ for Stein:

The cause of an excitement is this, the language is not the same, the door is not the same. . . .

In bringing a thing into the country can we ask is it of gold. A country is not in a circle it is near and in the distance. (146)

This is essentially a statement of the problem of identity. At any given moment, the individual is all past moments plus this one. The past, in terms of experience, is not remembered but is inside him; it forms him as he is. At another moment, the past, which is cumulative experience, and the present will be different and he will be different. This difference militates against a continuing identity and, since the past is the person, not what is remembered, against time. In dramatic terms, it prevents the creation of characters, since characterization posits continuity, development and identity as opposed to the discrete moments of the "human mind." To attempt to make an identity or time in this situation causes "excitement" or nervousness. It creates syncopated time, the

history "near and in the distance," rather than a "continuous present." This is reiterated with "I know nothing more difficult than to imagine addresses" (148). Places carry an identity; they are the objectification in time of the space that constitutes the play. Places have extrinsic meaning attached to them; words, in Stein's writing, cannot have such meanings. The real movement of the play is not a movement to places but a melopoeic and spatial one, the movement of:

And addresses.
Dresses and addresses.
Circular dresses.
Rescue. (148)

The theory in the play continues:

I reason like this. A proceeding which necessitates that recollection perfection selection and protection rhyme and that stupefaction action satisfaction and subtraction rhyme and that dearer clearer freer and nearer follow one another a proceeding which not any one dislikes stamps a play as a wonderful beginning. (149)

Stein, with her usual urbanity, is taking the conventional identity-and time-ridden concept of the play to task. She has prefaced this with the heading "Conceive that as a circle" (149). In one sense we can. Rhyme and succession, as they are ordinarily used, move back and forth, connecting one line with another; they connect meanings. Stein's use lets them stand by themselves or "exist" because she

gives them nothing to connect. For her, then, they are only in relation and can be a space or a circle. But the criticism remains. The "proceeding" which permits connection ironically makes a play "a wonderful beginning." It does so because "play" must be understood in Stein's terms; it is a spatial, not a temporal, creation and so is a movement away from the "proceeding." The barb is pointed to again in the line, "Indeed we draw two pictures one with glasses one without" (149), a passage reminiscent of the "something" that results when eyeglasses are used as a magnifying glass to read words one at a time. The remainder of the play returns to all the "somethings" that have existed throughout, closing the circle, defining the space.

Objects Lie On a Table is in the same period of playwriting as A Circular Play but it is already much more advanced in its chosen techniques and much less accessible to criticism. The painting element is more dominant, the image of the still-life running through the play. Less obvious is the theory which we found introduced into A Circular Play and the creation of an inclosed space by simple sound patterns and repetitions.

The contact in Objects Lie On a Table is with the objects as they "are." They are used as a still-life arrangement is used by a painter, as a model for the essence of what will be the painting or, in Stein's case, the

play: "I find that milk salt flour and apples and the pleasant respective places of each one in the picture make a picture" (106).²⁵ The objects are described from inside; the description is folded over them. Thus:

The objects on the table have been equal to the occasion. We can decorate walls with pots and pans and flowers. I question the flowers. And bananas. Card board colored as bananas are colored. And cabbages. Cabbages are green and if one should not happen to be there what would happen, the green would unhappily unhappily result in hardness and we could only regret that the result was unfortunate and so we astonish no one nor did we regret riches. (105).

Occasionally, though not as often as in A Circular Play, we get an explanation of the dramatic technique within the dialogue:

. . .objects on the table which means to us an arrangement. . . .

When I appeal I appeal to their relation. What is a relation. A British Dominion. . . .

Combining everything with everything. (106)

The same technique is still working; anything can be brought into relation within the space that is the play as long as causality is not involved.

The resemblance of the play to dance is stated with a verbal "quadrille" (107). The element of play in Art and, consequently, of arbitrariness in placing things in relation, is emphasized: "He will say that objects are to-day recognised as something with which to play.

And we will reply this is not why we like them here but the real reason is that we have not displaced them for a violin simply because of this reasoning. We have displaced them because we have replaced them" (109).

Plays are also related to our predilection for liking imitation or resemblances. This is a legitimate part of the feeling of a play so long as it does not become the work's essence:

What is a play.

A play is scenery.

A play is not identity or place or time but it likes to feel like it oh yes it does it does wonderfully well like to feel like it.

That is what makes it a play.²⁶

That feeling for resemblance or identity can be made the subject of the "human mind." When it is, the resemblances will bring things into a new relation, will startle us with a new movement in space. This is what happens in the "imitation" passage of Objects Lie On a Table:

Imitate a cheese very well if you please. . . .

I have a special taste in feeling. I can feel very well. I can feel that some resemblances the resemblance between a sausage made of sugar and a sausage made of meat is not as great as the resemblance between an object made of almonds and an object made of wood. How often do we see what we have not readily recognized. I readily recognize the object that has the most perfect quality of imitation. (110)

The "human mind" is not time or resemblance or identity,

but it can write about these things.

Perhaps the best metaphor for the play is the now famous "rose" lines:

Do we suppose that a rose is a rose. Do we suppose that all she knows is that a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose. He knows and she knows that a rose is a rose and when she can make a song as to which can belong as to what can belong to a song. (110)

This affirmation of existence uncomplicated by anything beyond the fact of being is a description of the play.

It is timeless; it exists in space and is a space. Therefore, its movement must be static. There is a movement of changing relations rather than a movement through time. The play is a painting; each relation is a new perspective, of equal importance with the last.

Gertrude Stein's own comments about this passage are relevant to much of the method of the plays. Speaking in Chicago to a group of students she said:

"Now listen! Can't you see that when the language was new—as it was with Chaucer and Homer—the poet could use the name of a thing and the thing was really there? He could say 'O moon,' 'O sea,' 'O love' and the moon and the sea and love were really there. And can't you see that after hundreds of years had gone by and thousands of poems had been written, he could call on those words and find that they were just wornout literary words? The excitingness of pure being had withdrawn from them; they were just rather stale literary words. Now the poet has to work in the excitingness of pure being; he has to get back that intensity into the language. We all know that it's hard to write poetry in a late age; and we know that you have to put some strange-

ness, something unexpected, into the structure of the sentence in order to bring back vitality to the noun. Now it's not enough to be bizarre; the strangeness in the sentence structure has to come from the poetic gift, too. That's why it's doubly hard to be a poet in a late age. Now you all have seen hundreds of poems about roses and you know in your bones that the rose is not there. . . . Now listen! I'm no fool. I know that in daily life we don't go around saying "is a. . . is a. . . is a. . ." Yes, I'm no fool; but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years.²⁷

One makes this poetry that is pure "being" by a process of concentration, by making the word the "human mind":

When I said.

A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

And then later made that into a ring I made poetry and what did I do I caressed completely caressed and addressed a noun.²⁸

She also made a circle, an inclosed space.

Stein sums up her accomplishment and intent in playwriting in the final sentences of the play: "Can you succeed and do you succeed. I succeed in recalling this to their mind. I do not fall behind" (111). Notably she has not recalled anything to her own mind because hers is the writing "human mind" which can neither remember nor forget. She has not created a syncopated time but a play in which one cannot fall behind the action.

CHAPTER THREE

The Play as Landscape: Four Saints in Three Acts

The play as painting soon gives way to the play as landscape in the development of Stein's style. With this new structure, the obvious associations and puns, the theoretical digressions of the earlier plays, yield to a more unified impression formed by seemingly unassociated verbal patterns. Conventional analysis of words, associations, symbols and sentence structures as a means of interpretation becomes increasingly useless. Most important, time becomes active again in the play. This is not a sequential time but a movement of time in space. The new mode of time controls Four Saints in Three Acts and probably was most responsible for the confusion¹ among drama critics when the play was first staged. But that confusion provides a major clue as to the critical approach necessary for Stein's plays. Jane Franklin, for example, comments:

Gertrude Stein wrote the words for this Negro opera, which ought to explain much. Only in her autobiography and in her correspondence with tradesmen has Gertrude ever been known to have written coherently or intelligibly.

.

The system on which the Gertrude Stein song is built is a direct steal from Barnum and Bailey's three-ring circus. The music, which is lovely, has nothing to do with the words, and the words, which have a tendency to make you feel like the coffee was straight rye in disguise, have nothing to do with the music. To balance things up, the pantomime has positively no connection with

either words or music.

.
 . . . in the foreground we see a Spanish don and
 senorita. . . . That is as far as the story goes. . . .

But don't get the impression that there is no
 coherent conversation in the opera. There is a very
 definite memory of a spot in Act 3. . . in which we find
 a gentleman saint asking a lady saint, "How do you do?"
 and just as nicely as nice, she tells him: "Very well,
 thank you."²

Examining these comments, we find that Jane Franklin
 has attended the Stein-Thomson opera demanding that
 there be a "coherent" connection between words, music
 and action, a "coherent" plot, a "coherent" dialogue,
 a "coherent" use of the language and the dramatic struc-
 ture. By "coherent" she means "conventional" and, more
 generically, "narrative."

This review exemplifies what the critic must not
 do with Stein's plays. He cannot analyze in terms of
 narrative, symbolism and association and produce an
 answer compliant with the "logic" of his terms. With
 such an analysis, he can, perhaps, point out the con-
 stant punning on "seen" and "scene." He can show the
 puns in the scene with the nuns in which the dialogue
 runs: ". . . when they made their habits. Habits not
 hourly habits habits not hourly at the time that they made
 their habits not hourly they made their habits" (19).³ He
 can note the frequency with which variations of the line
 "When this you see remember me" (56) appear in the plays.
 Or, as Rosalind Russell does, he can explain puns like

"add some" (27) and link them with Joyce's use of "adsum."⁴ Having done this, the critic will undoubtedly feel he has enlightened his readers, for just such an explanation of symbol and association has provided the "key" to any number of works. But in the case of Gertrude Stein, the explanations, unless a lot of unjustifiable guessing is done to connect them, remain as discrete as the references they purport to elucidate. We are no further towards an understanding of the play as an indivisible whole; indeed, such an exegesis may be the most direct route away from the work itself. The explanation illuminates only if it sees the techniques of the plays as the concrete realization of Stein's theories, not if it seeks to establish the more usual causal relationships between words in a play.

Stein is not particularly concerned with symbols and so never elaborates them into a unifying motif. But she does often make very personal allusions, allusions which she sometimes explains in her lectures and autobiographies. This is one case where I think we are justified in searching an author's personal history for explanations of her writing. While such a source may not always directly explain the function of an object in the play, some knowledge of how it came to be there cannot help being useful in a consideration of the entire structure of the play. Again, however, the source

is not the "meaning," for that lies only in the contact of the words, a contact related to the "human mind," not to biography and its concomitant identity.

It seems that we would do well to consider Franklin's review, and others like it, with the guides that Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein have themselves given set well before us. Thomson, in prefatory remarks to a radio broadcast of Four Saints in Three Acts, asked, "Please do not try to construe the words of this opera literally. . .or to seek in it any abstruse symbolism. If, by means of the poet's liberties with logic and the composer's constant use of the simplest elements in our musical vernacular, something is here evoked of the child-like gaiety and mystical strength of lives devoted in common to a non-materialistic end, the authors will consider their message to have been communicated."⁵ Thomson has answered the charges of incoherence in dialogue and plot. The opera is emotion, not logic. Stein provides her own answer to the remaining criticism, that there is no connection between the music and the words of her opera. Writing about Four Saints in Three Acts, she says, "As yet they have not done any of mine [my plays] without music to help them. They could though and it would be interesting. . . ." ⁶ A necessary interconnectedness of the music and the play is not, therefore, a condition of Stein's opera. Nor is it a preconception upon which any

criticism of her work must be based. Her statement makes possible literary criticism, as opposed to literary-musical criticism which would study the score as well as the libretto of the opera.

Obviously, we must approach Stein's plays on her own terms. These are terms of time and space and, in the case of Four Saints in Three Acts, movement of time in space, or landscape. Stein accepted a need for continuing contemporaneity in art and, typically, expressed it in terms of time. "There must be a reality that has nothing to do with the passage of time. . .," she writes.⁷ However, a "prolonged present" in a play creates problems even beyond those it makes in the novel. We have noted how Stein was made "nervous" in the theatre because her emotion was always in syncopated time to that of the actors.⁸ That is, her emotion was either behind, in recognition, or ahead, in anticipation, of the actor's emotion. This necessitated remembering and so precluded the "continuous present." In Four Saints in Three Acts, it is Stein's refusal to have her saints remember that helps to create the "continuous present": "No saint to remember to remember. No saint to remember. Saint Therese knowing young and told" (22).

Some of this syncopated time arises out of the visual-aural conflict in the theatre. It is here that Stein makes one of her many linkages with other movements

of the 1920's:

I suppose one might have gotten to know a good deal about these things from the cinema and how it changed from sight to sound, and how much before there was real sound how much of the sight was sound or how much it was not. In other words the cinema undoubtedly had a new way of understanding sight and sound in relation to emotion and time.⁹

Film makers' accounts of their work authenticate this statement. Sergei Eisenstein at one point sees a "conflict between optical and accoustical experience" which can be used to produce "sound-film. . .capable of being realized as audio-visual counterpoint."¹⁰ This corresponds with a passage from Four Saints in Three Acts:

Saint Therese seated and not surrounded. There are a great many persons and places near together.

There are a great many persons and places near together.

Saint Therese not seated at once. There are a great many places and persons near together.

Saint Therese once seated. There are a great many places and persons near together. Saint Therese seated and not surrounded. There are a great many places and persons near together. (22)

I doubt that any attempt would be made on the stage to literally present Saint Therese alone as opposed to a "great many places." Instead, the stage movement would likely be quite unconnected with much of the text, although Saint Therese might sit down alone. What would be suggested through the characters is the emotion of counterpoint. Here the use of two actors playing Saint

Therese together is significant. But, apart from the acting, the emotion of counterpoint is inherent in the words themselves. Stein is fully aware of the visual impact of sound; it is the visual element which she seeks to destroy in works like Tender Buttons so that language can be revitalized. It is her presumed destruction of visual meaning which lies behind accusations of her "incoherence." But Stein is destroying visual coherence only insofar as she follows one word or sentence with another that seems to be a visual non sequitur. The choice of these seeming non sequiturs in this scene is, however, with an awareness of the counterpoint of their visual associations. This effect is intensified by the purely aural counterpoint of \bar{e} , \check{o} , and \bar{o} in the "Saint Therese seated and not surrounded" sentence against \hat{a} , \bar{a} , \check{a} , \tilde{e} , and \check{e} in the "There are a great many persons and places near together" line. We have, then, complications on Eisenstein's cinema technique. There is counterpoint both within the audio and visual aspects of the written libretto and between them. This counterpoint is unified in the stage action which would not be designed as a literal interpretation of the words but as an expression of the emotion of the counterpoint of the audio-visual world.

A modification of this counterpoint is Stein's use of repetition in the play:

Saint Cecile. Ten.
 Saint Answers. Ten.
 Saint Chavez. Ten.
 Saint Settlement. Ten.
 Saint Plan. Ten.
 Saint Anne. Ten.
 Saint Plan. Ten.
 Saint Plan. Ten.
 Saint Plan. Ten. (42)

This pattern is also operative in "Let Lucy Lily Lily Lucy Lucy let Lucy Lucy Lily Lily Lily Lily Lily let Lily Lucy Lucy let Lily. Let Lucy Lily" (47). Such a technique "insists": ". . .the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis. And so let us think seriously of the difference between repetition and insistence."¹¹ Insistence is, of course, the peculiar strength of the film frame. Rosalind Russell¹² connects "Lucy" with Lucey Church, which was to be the impetus for Lucey Church Amiably, and concludes that the passage is a sort of "Hallelujah." Although the words may be literally unassociated, this impression seems emotionally unified with the use of "Lily," the sound of the passage and the preceding marriage of Saint Ignatius to the church.

I earlier cited Stein's conversation with Charlie Chaplin in which he deplores the imposition of rhythm on a film by sound.¹³ Stein generalizes Chaplin's advocacy of disconnectedness between sight and sound in a manner

that explains her play-as-landscape theory: "In short this generation has conceived an intensity of movement so great that it has not to be seen against something else to be known, and therefore, this generation does not connect itself with anything, that is what makes this generation what it is and that is why it is American. . . ." ¹⁴ She also insists on the influence of the arts on one another in this matter of disconnectedness: ". . . any one is of one's period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of cinema and series production. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing." ¹⁵ For Stein the cinema and series production were characterized by their disconnectedness. The frames or pieces simply were; they did not make a progression or a story.

Eliminating narrative, or a series of time-related situations, goes some way towards solving the difference between audience and stage tempo. The audience is no longer ahead of or behind the action. But what about the emotion of the play? Will that still be in syncopated time with the emotion of the audience?

Sequential time being eliminated, this syncopation will be spatial. What Stein felt to be an American lack of connection, extended to include space as well as time, precludes explanation, in which causal relationships are

posited, and necessitates description. Writing, therefore, is a description of space.

A further consideration of American disconnectedness will facilitate a more exact definition of that description of space. "Think of anything, of cowboys, of movies, of detective stories, of anybody who goes anywhere or stays at home and is an American and you will realize that it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving. . . ." ¹⁶ Here time has been reintroduced. But it is time inclosed in a defined area; in other words, it is static, spatialized time, or landscape. ¹⁷ In a landscape, movement is definitively contained. There can be, therefore, no progression. This lack of progression will enable changes in emotion without "nervousness." These changes, in terms of movement of time, will be lateral like the movement in dance; they will not be backwards and forwards. There will, therefore, no longer be the problem of the audience's emotion being ahead of or behind that of the actors'. Stein sees this in Four Saints in Three Acts:

. . . it made a landscape and the movement in it was like a movement in and out with which anybody looking on can keep in time. I also wanted it to have the movement of nuns very busy and in continuous movement but placid as a landscape has to be because after all the life in a convent is the life of landscape, it may look excited a landscape does sometimes look excited but its quality is that a landscape if it ever did go away would

have to go away to stay.

. . .it moves but it also stays. . . .18

Landscape is a physical reality and any physical reality constitutes the "continuous present." Stein had begun emphasizing that early in her career.

Writing a play that is a landscape is apt to prove somewhat more difficult than merely theorizing about such a possibility. Stein is able to approach the play itself by comparing the egoism of the painter with the egoism of the writer: "After all the egoism of a painter is not at all the egoism of a writer. . . ."19

A painter's literary idea always consists not in the action but in the distortion of the form. That could never be a writer's literary idea. Then a painter's idea of action always has to do with something else moving rather than the center of the picture. This is just the opposite of the writer's idea, everything else can be quiet, except the central thing which has to move.20

The differences in the movement between painting and writing explain the integration of time into space to create an inclosed space dealing with the "continuous present" in literature. If we consider the Cubists, we find that they were concerned with presenting an object seen from all sides. Thus the center of the painting, the side seen from any given angle, remained static while the other, re-created, perspectives made a movement around it. This is a strictly spatial movement. But in writing,

where the "perspectives" are situations and the center, or character and writer, must move from one situation to another, it is the center of the work of art that moves. Above all, since the character cannot move through all situations simultaneously, there is a movement of time in space. But these situations are unconnected. Stein tells us over and over that the saints do nothing in their play. Their movement is only a presentation of another physical reality. They constitute a landscape in that they make an inclosed static space on which we look. But their perspectives are revealed by their presentation of them, not by our changing position as would happen in a natural landscape. They become the "center that moves" in a movement of time in space. For this reason, two of the four saints can be Saint Therese.

A close examination of the libretto of Four Saints in Three Acts reveals clues to and emphasis on the foregoing approach. The Prelude is entitled "A Narrative of Prepare for Saints." In it, all the scenery, all the emotion, to be found in the following four acts is touched upon. We have a landscape overview. The "love" of the first line, for example, is a part of the landscape perspective of Act III's "It is very easy to love alone" (49). This does not mean that there is any concrete association between these two sections of the play but only that, by "beginning again," they are parts of the same emotional,

spatial landscape. By the fifth line, "Four saints prepare for saints it makes it well well fish it makes it well fish prepare for saints" (15), we have a summation, a circling, an inclosed space or landscape of the previous four lines. We are told this is a "narrative of prepare for saints" and "what happened today, a narrative" (15), after the manner of the play as the "essence" rather than the story of what happened. And already we get the changing emphasis which indicates a different perspective is being presented to us: "A saint is one to be for two when three and you make five and two and cover" (15). Numbers, as they appear here and in The Curtain Raiser, are one of Stein's favorite methods of denoting movement in landscape. Often they will take the form of the rhythmical movement of non-narrative nursery rhymes. Thus Act I, Scene VII,²¹ opens with "One two three four five six seven all good children go to heaven some are good and some are bad one two three four five six seven" (32). Counting by existences instead of progressions is exhibited in lines like "Four saints born in separate places./Saint saint saint saint" (20).

We get the first movement of time in space in:

We had intended if it were a pleasant day to go to the country it was a very beautiful day and we carried out our intention. We went to places that we had been when we were equally pleased and we found very nearly what we could find and returning saw and heard that after all

they were rewarded and likewise. This makes it necessary to go again. (16)

This is picked up at the beginning of the next paragraph: "He came and said he was hurrying hurrying and hurrying to remain. . ." (16). Here we have the movement of time which must ultimately remain static because it is in a closed space. The movement is a lateral one, "as within within nearly as out. It is very close close and closed" (17). At the end of the play this lateral movement once again asserts itself:

They have to be to see.
To see to say.
Laterally they may. (56)

Stein is obviously not telling a story or creating a symbolism. She is guiding the reader to the essence of what her play is: ". . .the movement in it was like a movement in and out with which anybody looking on can keep in time."

There are other ways of emphasizing the place of time in the landscape. The passages about remembering seasons present it as perspectives or "continuous present." "In idle acts" (19) stresses the static landscape quality of the saints. Successive time is non-existent: "Four saints were not born at one time although they knew each other" (20). They knew each other because the saints

are all part of a single inclosed space, the play-landscape. Or, in "Four saints have to have to have at a time" (18), the play is "at a time," not through a time; it is temporally static. There are also more purely scenic directions in the Prelude. Thus "One not in the sun./Not one not in the sun" (16) emphasizes the shifting perspective of the landscape. This occurs again with:

Two and two saints.
One and three saints.
In place. (17)

Again the emphasis is on the spatial rather than on the temporal. Finally we must notice the use of the verb to create landscape. "It is wonderful the number of mistakes a verb can make. . . ,"²² Stein tells us. Verbs can become other things, such as nouns and adjectives, and so they gain liveliness. They have the ability to move within a self-contained space. Thus sentences like "Have to have have to have to" (18) carry impact as part of the emotional landscape and create ambiguity through their rhythm and grammatical "mistakeness." A small change in the verb works in much the same, though more obvious, manner. So:

As said saints.
And not annoy.
Annoint. (18)

This sort of ambiguity prepares us for the purpose of the play, stated at the end of the prelude: "Any one to tease a saint seriously" (21). This is to be the opera, a landscape of mingled laughter and gravity, of mockery and sanctity.

Act I is "Avila: St. Therese half indoors and half out of doors." This is one aspect of Saint Therese's being. She is "about to be" (23). We are told that she is in the "continuous present": "No saint to remember to remember. No saint to remember. Saint Therese knowing young and told" (22). Here also Therese asserts her position as the moving center of the work. Asked if she would kill "five thousand chinamen" she replies, "Saint Therese not interested" (22). Why? ". . . five thousand Chinamen were something I could not imagine and so it was not interesting."²³ It is Therese's imagination which, therefore, becomes the center of and determines the landscape of the play.

In "Repeat First Act" we get the frivolity of April Fool's day and the trivial language rhythms replacing the more serious situation preceding it. The dual aspect of the play-landscape, as it is stated at the end of the Prelude ("tease a saint seriously"), appears. By "Enact end of an act" the emotion changes again. We once more see the emphasis on the saints, on landscape as being, not

doing. This will be the dominant approach to the characters throughout Act I. Ignatius is "left to be" (23) and we are left with the ambiguity of "Saint Therese seated and if he could be standing and saying and saying left to be" (23). Surely "he" is both Ignatius and Saint Therese and that is why Bruce Howard played Saint Therese II. This casting also unites the hero-heroine opposition traditional in plays. The following passage, with its refusal to have saints either seated or standing "In place of situations" (24) is a refusal to have saints do, which would be temporal and situational, and an assertion of their right to be, which is spatial.

Scene Two shows "Many saints as seen" (25). Again there is the portrayal of landscape as perspective: "Can two saints be one" (25). "Saint Therese and three saints all one./Who separated saints at one time" (25). This peculiar shifting of perspective is the only movement to be found in Four Saints in Three Acts and it is a movement which is really only a poetic re-phrasing of the "continuous present." "In this way as movement./In having been in" (26), Stein describes it. The second Scene III provides an assonantal "continuous present" of \bar{o} , \bar{a} , \bar{a} , \bar{e} , \bar{i} , \bar{o} , \bar{e} :

How many saints can be and land be and sand be and on a high plateau there is no sand there is snow and there is made to be so and very much can be what there is to see

when there is a wind to have it dry and be what they can understand to undertake to let it be to send it well as much as none to be to be behind. None to be behind. Enclosure. (27)

That Stein intended these vowel patterns to form a movement only within the defined space of the landscape is evident in the final word "Enclosure." This passage dissolves into the reference to Ignatius as porcelain and once more the movement is one of emotion as the trivia of egg cups is introduced. But all this is part of the inclosed space, often described in conventional landscape terms, as when "In clouded" becomes "Included" (27).

By Scene IV we get description of literal landscape culminating in a static characterization of Saint Therese: "This amounts to Saint Therese. Saint Therese has been and has been./All Saints make Sunday Monday . . ." (29). The repetition of Act One is the technique of "beginning again" which Stein employs as early as Three Lives: "Saint Therese has begun to be in act one" (31). And all the components of the first part of this repetition, "preparing," "singing," "winning," "snow," "thirds," "land and laid," have appeared earlier. The repetition ends with a punning declaration of play as landscape and "beginning again and again": "Scene one seen once seen once seen" (32).

Act II, "Might it be mountains if it were not

Barcelona," is of Saint Ignatius. Scene IV is a "scene of changing from the morning to the morning" (33), a scene of movement of time, not through time. Stein engineers this by moving her adverb, "fortunately," around in her sentence, thus creating different perspectives for the same set of words:

To be interested in Saint Therese fortunately.
 Saint Ignatius to be interested fortunately.
 Fortunately to be interested in Saint Therese.
 To be interested fortunately in Saint Therese. (33)

In Saint Therese's marriage in Scene VI, she is characterized as "in place" and, now that she can truly "be," the question of her moving, as the center of the landscape, is raised: "Can any one feel any one moving and in moving can any one feel any one and in moving" (35). The answer, of course, is "yes." For we do feel movement in this scene, again of a rhythmical and assonantal sort:

Saint Therese. Having happily married.
 Saint Therese. Having happily beside.
 Saint Therese. Having happily had it with a
 spoon.
 Saint Therese. Having happily relied upon noon.

 Saint Therese beside.
 Saint Therese added ride.
 Saint Therese with tied.
 Saint Therese and might.
 Saint Therese. Might with a widow. (35-36)

By Scene IX, the saints are asking "How much of it is

finished" (39). The lack of an answer is another bit of Stein's didacticism on the subject of time. "Finished" is obviously a term of time that cannot be applied to the play-landscape because landscape is always complete but, not moving through time, never ends.

Scene XI is a definite establishment of the inclosed space. The landscape of doors and windows, used in the Prelude to give Saint Therese her existence, is reintroduced. There is a "changing in between" (43), a moving from one perspective to another. But most important is the insistence on "Around and around and around and as round and as round and as around and as around and as around" (43). This inclosing is picked up again in "How many acts are there in it./Ring around a rosey" (54) where "Ring around a rosey" is a description of the play. We need only look at Stein's poem-motto



to see how this line is the inclosed space of the landscape.

In Act III, "Barcelona: St. Ignatius and One of Two Literally," the punning on "scene" to point to the landscape is continued: Scene One begins "And seen one" (45). Scene II contains an allusion to magpies which Stein has explained in her lectures and which shows how, for her,

literal and symbolic objects came to be dominated by their place in the landscape:

Magpies are in the landscape that is they are in the sky of a landscape, they are black and white and they are in the sky of the landscape in Bilignin and in Spain, especially in Avila. When they are in the sky they do something that I have never seen any other bird do they hold themselves up and down and look flat against the sky.

. . . They look exactly like the birds in the Annunciation pictures the bird which is the Holy Ghost and rests flat against the side sky very high.

.
They the magpies may tell their story if they and you like or even if I like but stories are only stories but that they stay in the air is not a story but a landscape.²⁴

Scene VIII is again particularly applicable to Stein's thesis about time. The essential timelessness of landscape is incorporated into the dialogue. "This is a setting which is as soon which is as soon ordinary setting which is as soon which is as soon and noon" (51). A return to "around" and to the "once in a while" of Act Two, Scene IX, is made and here the line becomes an aural counterpart of the theory of the play as inclosed space: "Once in a while and where and where around around is a sound and around is a sound and around is a sound and around. Around is a sound around is a sound around is a sound and around. Around differing from annointed now" (51). The scene ends with the insistence on the saints' "being," not "doing," the insistence being made through

the repetition of the verbs.

In Act IV Stein tells us what her play-landscape is escaping from: ". . .to be nearly lost to sight in time in time and mind mind it for them. Let us come to this brink" (55). Having reached the brink, time must be lateral movement in order to effect an escape. "Laterally they may" and "Saint Ignatius and left and right laterally be lined" (56) mark the landscape, the restricted movement of time.

Stein's theory of a movement of time in an inclosed space which constitutes a landscape provides the structure for Four Saints in Three Acts. We cannot say that the play is about the theory; it is about the emotion of being a saint. The landscape, therefore, is an emotional one and the allusions to a personal theory of the play-landscape throughout the libretto are a type of stage direction, a means to an expression of that emotion in a "continuous present," immediate to both actor and audience.

CHAPTER FOUR

The "Human Mind" Writing Itself: Listen To Me

We have seen that for Stein the first business of Art was the "composition of a prolonged present," "using everything by beginning again and again."¹ In early plays, like Objects Lie On a Table and A Circular Play, she attempted to create a "prolonged present" in a verbal equivalent of cubist painting. In Objects Lie On a Table, in particular, she moved away from associational techniques and began "using everything." By 1928, the time of Four Saints in Three Acts, Stein had extended "everything" to include other mediums; the "play" was now an opera. Moreover, her definition of writing had changed. In cubist painting, the center of the painting remains static and its perspectives create a movement around it. Stein herself equates her early plays with such painting. By the time of Four Saints in Three Acts, she had decided that, in writing, "everything else can be quiet, except the central thing which has to move."² The play had become landscape with a movement of time in space.

In the plays of these two periods language is re-structured to shape a play that is governed by a principle outside language itself. Hence the play as painting and the play as landscape. But in the 1930's

Stein became increasingly interested in language itself as the principle of the play. This follows upon a generally more intense interest in the possibilities of language as the sole principle shaping the work of art, evidenced in her 1935 lecture, "Poetry and Grammar."³

By 1936, in Listen To Me, language had become more than the means of expression; it had become the subject and the technique, the informing principle of the play.

Listen To Me is essentially a meditation on language.

Allegra Stewart⁴ records that Stein had spent a certain part of each day in meditation for a number of years. On the basis of this fact, Stewart goes on to apply a modified mandala interpretation to Tender Buttons. Meditation need not be taken in any mystical sense in Listen To Me. Here the meditation is very simply on the nature of language and on the relationships within it; there is no attempt to create a pattern outside language itself.

The opening of the play corresponds to the beginning of Stein's lecture on grammar:

There are three characters.
 The first one says. No noun is remown.
 The second one says. Forget the air
 The first one says. But you need the air
 The third one says. For has nothing to do with get.
 They giggle. . . . (387)⁵

Most important to the play as a whole is perhaps the use of contrasting rhythms in the passage. The conversational

rhythm of "The first one says" is opposed to the rhythm of writing. This opposition is emphasized by the use of a period where, in recorded conversation, we would usually use a comma or, in the stage directions of a play, we would use a colon. This contrast is consistent with Stein's other meditations on the English language: ". . . because everybody talks as the newspapers and movies and radios tell them to talk the spoken language is no longer interesting and so gradually the written language says something and says it differently than the spoken language. . . . So soon we will come to have a written language that is a thing apart in English."⁶ In Listen To Me terms: "To talk is very pleasant when it looks like writing" (391). This theory transforms the soliloquy which begins a few lines after the first passage from an imitation or parody of Elizabethan drama into the essence of modernism. If the spoken word is no longer interesting to writing, conversation in a play is no longer possible. But the words of drama must be heard. The soliloquy, an overheard expression of emotion, provides an answer. Here the actual speaking is a convention; the soliloquy is inner-directed, is in the artist writing the "human mind." It is in keeping with the play as meditation.

The "thing apart" begins with "No noun is renowned." The implication seems to be that no noun can be

with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. . . .

Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns."⁹ Thus the line "une amie a un ami" with its "caressing" of the noun into a new meaning. So also "Si non oui" where, always naming "yes," the "oui" ("yes") is "betrayed" by a stronger, negative affirmative, "si" ("but yes," when used after a negative).

The statements I have been using to explicate Stein's texts are made about poetry while most of her plays seem to be prose. Where poetry is recognizably present, it tends to be so by virtue of doggerel or nursery-rhyme rhythm. A consideration of Stein's differentiation between poetry and prose will extend the relevance of these remarks to the writing of the plays. "Prose," she writes,

can be the essential balance that is made inside something that combines the sentence and the paragraph. . . .
 . . .prose is bound to be made up more of verbs adverbs prepositions prepositional clauses and conjunctions than nouns. . . .the vocabulary in respect to prose is less important than the parts of speech, and the internal balance and the movement within a given space.¹⁰

Where prose is a refusal to name, poetry is a discovery of names:

. . .I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see the things to look at and in so doing I had of course to name them not to give them new names but to see that I could find out how to know that they were there by their names or by replacing their names. And how was I to do so. They had their names and naturally I called them by the names they had and in doing so having begun looking at them I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry, . . .it made the Tender Buttons. . . .¹¹

But Tender Buttons was also an attempt to replace the name of the thing with the thing itself:

. . .I decided that if one definitely completely replaced the noun by the thing in itself, it was eventually to be poetry and not prose which would have to deal with everything that was not movement in space. There could no longer be form to decide anything, narrative that is not newspaper narrative but real narrative must of necessity be told by any one having come to the realization that the noun must be replaced not by inner balance but by the thing in itself and that will eventually lead to everything.¹²

The difference, therefore, between poetry and prose is the movement in space that is prose and the absence of movement that is poetry. But, if we remember that the space of prose is self-contained and that, therefore, the movement is not progressive but static, and if we take Stein at her word when she says, "there could no longer be form to decide anything," we must conclude that, ultimately, no distinction can be made between the two. There is no well-defined poetry and prose; there is only writing which is a "continuous present" created by the movement of time within an inclosed space, or landscape. Listen To Me can

be classified only as a play that is writing.

But, for all that Stein may seek to rediscover the names of things seen, names do remain names and this quality forms part of the subject of meditation on language:

Three four seven characters yes because seven is seven.

How sweet of seven to be seven. (388)

Language diminishes as well as increases in its vitality. The passage continues:

The last of seven speaks first.

What does it speak about. It speaks about the great difficulty of what anything is about. (388)

Here we find the ambiguity of the language, a re-phrasing of the "rose is a rose" problem. A rose is a rose; it is not a table or a painting or a dog or any other noun. Yet, in terms of writing, a rose is no longer a rose because the name no longer conjures up any real object. The name is no longer "what anything is about."

This same theme is picked up later in the play:

First character. First character is not lonesome when chess is changed to checkers.

But said the other one no one can use these words because these words can change.

Oh said the other one can words change.

Yes said the other one words cannot change but anybody can put anything away.

Where said the other one can they put anything away.

Why not if they do.

Is said by not more than one at a time.

This prepares everything so well that very soon and very shortly they are not able to cherish what they would like. (393)

The rigidity of nouns is being explored. If the first character is not lonesome it is because the pattern, the structural principle, of chess and checkers is the same. But words can be changed because they can be "put away"; therefore chess and checkers are not the same. Meanings are "put away" over the years or, as Stein does, an author may reject meanings in an attempt to re-name. Because nouns can change in this way and yet retain their rigidity (because, after all, "things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns"¹³), one cannot use them mistakenly in the same way one does other parts of speech. Naming anything is a separating of that thing from other things. It is a defining. By refusing to name, the thing, in its writing, retains or regains its vitality. This is the stated intent of part of a passage in Listen To Me:

Lillian has never divided anything from anything and in this way the earth is the earth and the earth which is the earth which is, there is a hesitation not within but without, which is, there is no hesitation within without (394)

The paradox here is that nouns must be used to overcome

the very deadness of naming. But, they are used with "passion."

The element of division from other things in definition is elaborated in the "earth-air" passage:

Fifth character.	What is done
Sixth character.	The earth and the air.
All together.	Dear me the earth and the air and I thought it was everywhere.
Seventh character.	Well it is not everywhere
Eighth character.	No indeed because there are people everywhere. . . . (401)

The limitations of definition are emphasized at the same time Stein "caresses" a noun, naming it ("genius") with "passion" a few lines later:

Sweet William.	And what is a genius
Dear Sweet William.	Where is a genius
Dear Sweet William..	Why is a genius
Dear Sweet William.	What is a genius. . . . (401)

The absence of punctuation at the end of the lines creates a double function for the "Dear Sweet William" portions. They are obviously meant as stage directions to indicate the speaker. But, with the absence of punctuation, they become a part of the questions, a term of address as well. This double meaning, along with Stein's "insistence" or emphasis in repetition, is used to name the thing itself, to infuse the noun with a new life, even while showing us the real impossibilities of nouns in prose.

The problem of definition re-arises in Act III:

First character. No dog barks at the moon.
 Second character. The moon shines and no dog barks
 Third character. No not anywhere on this earth.
 Fourth character. Because everywhere anywhere there are
 lights many lights and so no dog knows that the moon is
 there
 Fifth character. And so no dog barks at the moon now
 no not anywhere.
 First character. And the moon makes no one crazy no
 not now anywhere.
 Second character. Because there are so many lights any-
 where. (402)

"And so any dog can know that luna now any longer has
 nothing to do with lunatic" (404). A poet can, there-
 fore, no longer name the moon and evoke the moon as a
 real presence. But the paradox we noted earlier keeps
 appearing. The dead word is the only word we have and
 so the re-naming must, as it is in this passage, be a
 revitalization of that word. In Stein's terms, "Eating
 is to eat" (404).

Almost the only adjectives in Listen To Me are
 those of "Dear Sweet William." There the adjectives
 become a proper name which Stein finds more interesting
 than a mere noun because of the element of recent choice
 involved in its assignment. Where adjectives appear in
 other parts of the play they are as out of place as "And
 so counting is lugubrious" (398), where "lugubrious" is
 used to work against the rhythm as well as the meaning of
 the sentence. Her reason for refusing to meditate except

briefly on adjectives is simple: ". . . adjectives effect nouns and as nouns are not really interesting the thing that effects a not too interesting thing is of necessity not interesting."¹⁴

Pronouns, however, are much more valuable to the writer. "They represent some one but they are not its or his name. In not being his or its or her name they already have a greater possibility of being something than if they were as a noun is the name of anything."¹⁵ There is only one brief passage in Listen To Me which explicitly reflects on pronouns, but it parallels Stein's theoretical statements exactly:

So then they do say something.
All together they say
Very well.
Does anybody know for certain how many characters
are they.
That is a question.
And as the earth is all covered with people this is
not a question because listen to me does anybody know for
certain how many characters there are. (395)

Here "they" takes on the infinite possibilities which Stein feels are denied to the noun.

Numbers pose a far larger problem and they run through the play. A number is not a noun in the strictest sense but it acts in the same way. It is a rigid force, making groups and definitions and ignoring specific, object-to-object differences. Because it makes groups, a number

cannot create contacts or movement. "After all the natural way to count is not that one and one make two but to go on counting by one and one as chinamen do as anybody does as Spaniards do as my little aunts did. One and one and one and one and one and one."¹⁶ The consideration of numbers begins with their relationship to nouns:

Three four seven characters yes because seven is seven.

How sweet of seven to be seven. (388)

Like nouns, the number is a name and nothing else; it remains unrelated to objects. The arbitrariness of numbers and their relationship to nouns is repeated over and over again:

That is what three said when they were five.
But there are never five. (391)

Second Character. If the earth is not covered with water what is water.

Third Character. If the air is not filled with air how can they dare.

Two together say that they will finish with everything.

Three and two do not make five because five is a number that they do not use therefore three and two make six. (393)

It is very charming that the whole earth is covered with people and everybody counting no one can count five. they can count two and three and four and six and seven but they cannot count five and eight not really five not really eight.

And after all make it daily.

First character. Some count eight daily. (394)

In Act Six, the acts, numbered, are designated as characters

and ask for definitions, exposing the lack of meaning in both nouns and numbers:

First Act. What is a game.
 First Act. A game is where they do it again.

 Second Act. What is the earth
 Second Act. The earth is altogether with or without water.

 Third Act. And what are people.
 Third Act. People are all over
 Third Act. Do you mean all over
 Third Act. No I do not mean all over.
 Third Act. Do you not do you not mean all over.

 Fourth Act. And what is the air.
 Fourth Act. The air is there. (414)

Act II exposes counting as self-centered; it does not make an inclosed space or a movement of time as the play must do:

Second character. If you counted a million would it make a trillion.
 Third character. Not necessary if there are never any less than six or two.
 Fourth character. No five or eight
 Fifth character. No five is ever alive.
 Sixth character. Counting does not letting counting count.
 Seventh character. And so every count is counted. (397)

Real counting is the recognition of feeling for single objects:

Third character. One at a time it is easy to be one at a time.
 Fourth character. As everybody knows what everybody knows. (408)

A more direct statement of the fallacy of numbers, as it is meditated on in the play, occurs in the "missing" Act V:

All the Characters. No Act Five

.
All the Characters. And so it is perfectly true that
through and through any number could be not true.

All the Characters. Happily arrange not to have the
number five.
And they count like that.

.
All the Characters. Nobody

All the Characters. Counts five

Curtain (413)

Finally Stein reveals how numbers function, or fail to function, in terms of the traditional dramatic divisions:

All the Acts together All the acts are never together
nothing is ever together there is no act one no act
two no act three no act four no act six there is act five.

Act V

No act five

Act five (418)

Here Stein is, I think, making an obscure but nonetheless basic assertion that the play is a unity, that it exists as "one," not as a subject for counting, no matter what the mode of that counting may be. The playwright and his audience must be like Lillian who "never divided anything from anything" (394). Otherwise the play cannot be the inclosed space, the landscape, which it must be to avoid the "nervousness" of syncopated time in the theatre.

A whimsical or even contemptuous attitude towards numbers is present in many of Stein's plays. However, she seldom elaborates her feelings about them as she does in this play. Her unusual treatment of numbers in Listen To Me extends to syllable counting. She says little about syllables in her explicatory work but seems to use them in two ways in this play: they serve to once again emphasize how uninteresting a noun is and they become the basis of an exploration of rhythm. The result is a play that might better be described as a "construct." The references to syllables begin with meditation on their nature: "What is a word of one syllable is it easier to understand than one of several. I wonder, anyway anything is the story of anybody's life" (389). This returns us to the central problem of Stein's plays, the seeming inevitability of linear succession in words as opposed to the need to create a "prolonged present." She implies that syllables, at least as we ordinarily use them, lead to this linear narration. The problem is to find some new way to use syllables; they must be "bold as old" (389) to stand out and defeat the linear. They must not be merely the components of a noun. Over and over, Stein slips away from the uninteresting noun by telling us how many syllables it has. Or she will put several words together to tell us again how many syllables they possess. This, like her use of nouns, can be paradoxical. By drawing our attention to the sim-

plest component of the word, she can give it new life as language. Thus:

And so there was no curtain.
Curtain is a word of two syllables. (389)

Sweet William prepared verdure.
Sweet William prepared pools.
Verdure two syllables
Pools one
Sweet William prepared what he had.
Had one syllable
He one syllable
What one syllable
Prepared. Three Syllables
Sweet William. . . . (399)

What each one can do
Words of one syllable
What each one does
Words of one syllable although it does not sound
like it.

.
Sweet William. Suddenly there is a war
Suddenly is a word of three syllables
There is a war
Words of one syllable (405)

Small words two syllables
Any ever after. (407)

Syllables, however, used properly, one by one, become an agent of unity. Stein tells us this too several times:

And so Sweet William came to be about.
About two syllables
Came one syllable
to one syllable
be one syllable
Now there is no opposition to anything being together. (400)

Think of syllables
That it is so

That is what Acts altogether are.
 Acts
 One syllable
 All
 One syllable
 To
 One syllable
 But gather or gather never one syllable.
 And so the Acts altogether know
 They know as if they tell it so.
 That to gather together
 Is not one syllable. (416)

Once again the single syllables, one by one, become the symbol of unity and an allegory for the unity of acts, taken one by one as a "continuous present," rather than as divisions "gathered together." The same theory is behind the lines:

Please kindly notice that over is two syllables and that makes all the trouble. Trouble has two syllables too.
 Fourth Act. And what is the air.
 Fourth Act. The air is there.
 Fourth Act. The air is there which is where it is.
 Kindly notice that is all one syllable and therefore useful. It makes no feeling, it has a promise, it is a delight, it needs no encouragement, it is full.
 (414)

Syllabic rhythm, another version of the landscape rhythm, is also possible:

So now be ready to prepare to come in and out.
 Out and about.
 Come one syllable
 In one syllable
 and one syllable
 Out one syllable
 about two syllables.
 And everything startling.
 Three syllables. (400-401)

This description of movement is similar to that at the end of Four Saints in Three Acts; it is the movement in and out, the movement of time in space that is rhythm. The unity and the rhythm of which the syllables have become symbolic are present in the final lines of the play:

How I would like that it could be that it could be said that it is true that one is too and two is three and three is four and five is two and one is one and a curtain can come and come, the only word here in two syllables is curtain, the only word in two syllables is William the only word in two syllables is Lillian the only word in three syllables is Characters and the only word in one syllable is Acts.

Acts

Curtain

Characters

Characters

Curtain

Acts

There is no one and one

Nobody has met any one

Curtain Can Come. (421)

The "continuous present" is created by the numbers, which refuse to retain their past meanings, and the series of "only" words. The inclosed space is made by the movement from "Acts" to "Acts" and by the lack of relationships which posit serial time in the last three lines. Throughout the passage, the absence of punctuation and the short syllables are used to build a movement in time that increases in speed to the climactic Anglo-Saxon down-beat of "Curtain Can Come."

An inferior, but still useful, role in language is played by conjunctions. "Conjunctions," for Stein, "have made themselves live by their work."¹⁷ In Listen To Me the meditation rests upon the subordinate conjunctions which are often repeated in rhythmical "insistence." Occasionally "and" is used to make what grammarians would term a "run-on" sentence. Stein often uses this to build up a paragraph-like emotion within the sentence:

And then they are not through with three.

And then they are solemn and they know that the world will. (387)

Interjections receive much more brusque treatment. An interjection appears only once in Listen To Me, as a motto: "Why should alas be near to nothing" (388). Made literal, this becomes a statement in Lectures in America: ". . .really interjections have nothing to do with anything not even with themselves."¹⁸

Stein's real interest in language was with prepositions and verbs. The first passage in the play concludes with: "The third one says. For has nothing to do with get" (387). The preposition and the verb together create an excitement; "they giggle" (387). In Lectures in America Stein tells us that "Prepositions can live one long life being really being nothing but absolutely nothing

but mistaken and that makes them. . .certainly something that you can be continuously using and everlastingly enjoying. I like prepositions the best of all. . . ."19
 Much of Stein's delight in prepositions comes from placing them ambiguously:

The fourth character. After all they enjoyed themselves
 And if they did not after all they
 enjoyed themselves. (388)

The prepositional phrase can be connected to either the subordinate or main clause of the latter sentence; the passage seems to aim solely at exploring the possibilities of creating such an ambiguity. Later in the play such a phrase will be used without an object, making the preposition function as any number of actions as well as positions or conditions:

Sweet William says enough is enough but he does
 not mean it. If he did would Lillian would Lillian.
 If he did would Lillian. (391)

This is immediately recognizable as the technique Stein had employed earlier in "A Completed Portrait of Picasso." Sometimes the preposition is used only for the joy Stein takes in pointing it out. Thus ". . .they are or are not counting to-day" (400), where the emphasis on the preposition makes "today" live as a word. The same sort of process is operant in "In no way is every day a part of

speech" (400), where the importance of the prepositional phrase is asserted. One of the "mistakes" a preposition can make is in its part of speech:

The last of seven speaks first.
 What does it speak about. It speaks about the
 great difficulty of what anything is about.
 Is about. He says. Is about.
 About what. He says. And what is about.
 Well what is about.
 What is it about puts in another word and it is
 as best yes. (388-389)

"About" functions variously as adverb, preposition and noun. The enlargement of meaning is gained by constructing the sentences so that it can function simultaneously as two parts of speech. This, again, is the technique of landscape, of creating a movement of time in space without making that movement through time.

Verbs and adverbs form the other class of "interesting" words for Stein. Of verbs she writes: "Nouns and adjectives never can make mistakes can never be mistaken but verbs can be so endlessly, both as to what they do and how they agree or disagree with whatever they do. . . . Beside being able to be mistaken and to make mistakes verbs can change to look like themselves or to look like something else, they are, so to speak on the move. . . ."20 Just as adjectives become uninteresting by their association with nouns, so adverbs become "interesting" by their association with verbs. Some of the

ambiguity of verbs lies in their tenses. "The third from the last now speaks which is not the same as is now speaking. But is it" (389). The implication is that "is now speaking," being a description, contains a past and future in it and is, therefore, less of a "continuous present" than "now speaks." These tense changes become a means of "insistence":

Now might the world be covered over by what it is.

It might.
And if it were were were.
It is.
Were
It is.
And if it is.
Were.
Well if it is.
Were if it is.

.
Have you forgotten that is was three four and seven. (392)

The juxtaposition of tenses has been used to create another kind of "continuous present." Like prepositions, verbs gain meaning by being mistaken for nouns. In the following passage, this is emphasized by their association with "name":

And so counting is lugubrious.
Character. And everybody counts.
Second character. What is a count
Third character. A count is a gentleman who has a name
Fourth character. And what is his name
Fifth character. His name is count.
All the characters. In this case is there a fifth character.
Fifth character. Yes because he can count. (398)

Another such meditation, complicated by spelling, occurs late in the play:

Fourth Character. The only one I know is not the one to know.

Third Character. No

Fourth Character. Oh no.

First Character. There is no no in no. (419)

In the final line, "no" functions as three parts of speech: "There is no [adjective] no [adverb but, because a definition is implied, here a predicate nominative] in no [know, a verb]." Importantly for Stein, this is a statement of theory, of a refusal to name, not only a visual or spelling trick.

Adverbs are most often used in the plays to make clauses. Stein is particularly fond of this sort of complication: "Complications make eventually for simplicity and therefore I have always like dependent adverbial clauses. . .because of their variety of dependence and independence."²¹ Love of complication is evident in sentences like "If it is not well done he is dead and they like to know that he is dead if it is well done" (387) and "Fourth character. If they told you did you know or did you only know that they told you so" (395). Adverbs, like verbs, become nouns: "Four characters now come together and think apart. They do not think therefore they think apart" (388). Because of its

association with "together," "apart" is obviously adverbial in the first sentence. In the second, however, it is more difficult to make such common associations and it seems possible that, related to the play, "apart" may become "a part."

Listen To Me is also a meditation on the rhythms and rhyme of language. Rhyme is a repetition and, for Stein, repetition of loved names was the natural form of poetry.²² Rhyme becomes a movement, a contact, within an inclosed space:

Second character. Listen to me and they do.
 It is natural that there are many
 It is natural that there are few
 A city says how do you do
 Or only one or two. (388)

The strong stresses combined with the repetitive rhyme create the inclosed space or landscape of the scene and the movement within it. In other passages internal rhymes and half-rhymes are used in the same way:

Dear Sweet William.
 There is no sighing.
 Lillian
 Need is not more cared for than needles.
 Dear Sweet William
 But weed to weed is not more cared for than nettles.
 Dear Sweet William
 Whatever we see is not whenever we do what.
 Lillian
 What.
 And she lay down on a sofa.
 All five characters rushed up.
 But there are not five
 Not even not alive. (390)

In addition to rhyme and assonance which create the cyclical movement, the modified refrain is used to "begin again and again." The forced rhyme of "William-Lillian" breaks the passage into "stanzas," or new beginnings, new perspectives from which to view the landscape. It creates a Steinian version of the ballad.

A great deal of the play experiments with line division to create rhythm. Here Stein was using the technique of her contemporaries and her work should be read as theirs, using the line-break, even when it has no punctuation, as a rhythmical device. Frequently appearing sentences are sometimes broken down to emphasize poetic rather than prose rhythm:

And he said
 All that was inside him inside dear Sweet William
 was shown not to be in him but to be held up so anyone
 looking could see them
 Dear Sweet William. (390)

The possibilities of creating rhythm by the poetic line division are several and their differences become a source of meditation and repetition in Listen To Me:

Sweet William had his genius and his Lillian.
 Sweet William had his genius
 Sweet William had his Lillian
 Sweet William
 Had his genius
 Sweet William
 Had his Lillian. (407)

Well well even if we had not met we would have met.
 Even if we had not met.

Yes met
 Even if we had
 Not met.
 And so even if we had not met. (420)

Stein believed in very little punctuation; she refused to use any at all, excepting periods and commas. Even commas were rejected for a time and she never came to use them with the same precision as periods.²³ In many cases she uses the period instead of a line division to create rhythm. For example, "The fifth one from the end one said. What is a genius she said and he said. . ." (389). A more complex use of punctuation breaks up repetitive elements that, like a chant, bind the play together in a "continuous present":

All together. Which is the first character.
 All together. The first character.
 After a little silence the first character says,
 After all does it matter.
 After that the first character says.
 But after all it does matter. (396)

The phrase itself is employed as a mode of rhythm or as a silence in the rhythm. Significantly, it is the adverbial phrase, one of the "interesting" group of words, which functions best in this respect:

There is no curtain because it does happen.
 Very well it does happen but very well is a hesitation and as there is a hesitation they say very well. (395)

"Very well" is indicative, therefore, of a pause both in the rhythm and in the thought of the play.

Aside from the ways we have seen Stein creating a "continuous present," she makes specific reference to a "prolonged present" and to landscape in the play:

No one literally [i.e., in writing] no one must remember anything.

They must be old with thought and they must not remember anything. (391)

This, in The Geographical History of America, is the theory that all past experiences must not be remembered, but must be a part of one's total present being. In drama, it eliminates the lag between the emotion of the characters and that of the audience by eliminating the need to remember emotion. Such a work of art is one in which "Very likely no one needs to remember any time" (392). Once again, emphasis is placed on the "continuous present" being "a natural composition in the world as it has been these thirty years"²⁴ that the earth has been entirely covered with people;

What happened when the earth was covered all over which it is

This happened that there was never any yesterday before today and no to-morrow after yesterday. (403)

The terms "yesterday," "today," and "tomorrow" have no meaning, being terms of time, in a "prolonged present."

"There is no after" (405). Parallel to this passage is:

Sweet William. Sunday is Sunday afternoon but it does not

come after Saturday or before Monday.

.
Second character. Nobody knows before. (409)

Similarly, "If the earth is which the earth is covered all over with people then there is no sudden no sudden any more" (405). "Sudden" is another term of serial time which has no place in the play of the "continuous present." Finally, an explicit rebuttal of serial time: "In no time at all there is no time" (394).

After a quiet moment there is no quiet moment
there is no quiet moment after or before.
All the characters. Why not
One syllable
All the characters. Because there is no after or before
Two syllables. (410)

As always in Stein's work, the question of identity in the "prolonged present" is of concern:

First character. I know I am
Second character. Who told you
Third character. What did they tell you
Fourth character. If they told you did you know or did
you only know that they told you so. (395)

This returns us to the "I am I because my little dog knows me"²⁵ statement which runs through The Geographical History of America. The answer has already been given in Listen To Me; the "prolonged present," the "human mind," is the present sum of experiences. It is without "after" or "before" and is unrelated to identity. The same answer is found in The Geographical History of America:

And so the little dog roams around he knows the one he knows but does that make any difference.

A play is exactly that.²⁶

The same sort of explicitness occurs within the play as landscape. Often the scenes are described in terms of landscape, not stage: "A chorus of three characters and then a chorus of four characters but the characters that are the three characters are not the same characters as the characters that are four characters" (387). The center of the landscape is moving here; the choruses are not the same, opposing this to the early "cubist" plays in which the center remained static. The same movement takes place in:

Sweet William is saying there is no Sweet William for Sweet William.

All of it has changed.

There is no Sweet William.

All of it has changed.

There is Lillian. (391)

Even more explicit are scene descriptions: "Now imagine a scene which is on this earth and as many come about as are and are not there" (391).

All together all the characters all together. All the earth is covered with people and so no one is lost because as the whole earth is covered with people people are people.

Suddenly in the midst of all this silence somebody begins talking. (394)

So now this scene is to take place it does not take place no scene takes place but it is to take place all over.

If it is all over it does not take place. (403)

All these descriptions speak with the general terms of landscape rather than with the specific terms of locale and properties which characterize stage directions. Consistent with a "prolonged present" or landscape in this play, the scenes are "being" and not "happening." By refusing locale for her scenes, Stein avoids the identity of place.

In Listen To Me, any discussion of language yielding a "continuous present" must consider Sweet William who seems to embody the ideal, the "human mind" as opposed to "human nature." He is one to whom "at a last means nothing" (392); he knows no serial time. He has no memory; "He had forgotten about it being the earth and all covered over with people but forgotten forgotten was never a memory to him" (411).

Sixth Act. The past has nothing ever nothing to do with Sweet William.

Sixth Act. Because

Sixth Act. There can never be too much of nothing.

Sixth Act. Not for dear Sweet William. . . . (415)

Similarly, he refuses to limit meaning by the divisions created by nouns:

Sweet William. What is the earth

Sweet William. I like not to know.

Sweet William. I like not to know where there is no difference. (411)

Nor does he experience the normal concern of "human

nature" with identity: "Sweet William is saying there is no Sweet William for Sweet William" (391).

It is not necessary that Sweet William says that all the earth is covered with Sweet William but he knows Sweet William knows he knows he knows he knows Sweet William is Sweet William. (397)

Identity does not matter to Sweet William and so leaves him with the "human mind." He is what he is as a part of humanity, not as an individual. Because he is what he is, the "human mind," the writer of the play, he contains all the themes of the play's meditation on language. Stein's occasional whimsicality is manifest in Sweet William's name; he has no "human nature," so is named after a flower.

The end of the play tells us what has happened: "What happens is this none of the characters have met they have not met yet if they have not met yet none of the characters have met none of the Acts have met none of the Characters and Acts have met yet. . ." (420). Characters and Acts are names, identities, numbers, divisions; they are representatives of "human nature" and sequential time. Their having not met is the virtue of the play and of Stein's meditations on language embodied in it. The play is the product of the writer as a "human mind." It is a theoretical extension of Four Saints in Three Acts; the action is one of movement of time in space, not one of cause and effect. Essentially we have

overheard several soliloquies of people who never meet, solving the problem of conversation in a culture which, so Stein felt, the spoken language is no longer interesting. The landscape of the play is a verbal landscape, rising out of and central to the writing the characters speak.

CHAPTER FIVE

Theme and Form Unite: The Mother of Us All

We have seen how Gertrude Stein attempted in different ways to come to terms with the problem of time in literature, a problem central to so many of the writers of the twentieth century. Objects Lie On a Table and A Circular Play, two of the earliest dramas, abolished time by creating the "continuous present" of the cubist painting, a present in which only the space, or perspective, moved. With Four Saints in Three Acts, the painting had been replaced by landscape; the play was now a movement of time within an inclosed space. By the time of the writing of Listen To Me, Stein had confined her concern with time to a consideration of the functions and forms of the words themselves. Thus we get a play in which sequential time is truly absent, in which the relationships and movements are only those created by the juxtaposing and mistaking of words.

At the end of her life, Stein wrote a last play which, unlike most of the others, is not the product of a development in her theories of grammar and stage syntax. Instead, these theories are merely the tools of something far more central to the dramatic situation in The Mother of Us All. The play has a center that is not a literary but a social idea; the literary technique is an end only

to an exploration of the world of women. It has real power in emotion which the other plays often lack in their experimental virtuosity. It is this emotion which places the play nearer the realm of "traditional" and, therefore, comprehensible, theatre for many. Indeed, Stein's fascination with words, repetition and rhyme and her penchant for incongruities often create a kind of pathos in this play:

Susan B. . . .there is no wealth nor poverty,
there is no wealth, what is wealth,
there is no poverty, what is poverty,
has a pen ink, has it.

Jo the Loiterer. I had a pen that was to have ink for
a year and it only lasted six weeks.

Susan B. Yes I know Jo. I know.

Curtain (69)¹

Susan B.'s voice. We cannot retrace our steps, going
forward may be the same as going
backwards. We cannot retrace our
steps, retrace our steps. All my
long life, all my life, we do not
retrace our steps, all my long life,
but.

(A silence, a long silence)

But—we do not retrace our steps, all
my long life, and here, here we are
here, in marble and gold, did I say
gold, yes I said gold, in marble and
gold and where—

(A silence)

Where is where. In my long life of
effort and strife, dear life, life
is strife, in my long life, it will
not come and go, I tell you so, it
will stay it will pay but

(A long silence)

But do I want what we have got, has it
not gone, what made it live, has it not
gone because now it is had, in my long
life in my long life

(Silence)

Life is strife, I was a martyr all my
life not to what I won but to what was
done.

(Silence)

Do you know because I tell you so, or
do you know, do you know.

(Silence)

My long life, my long life.

Curtain (87-88)

However, the emotion is not allowed to totally carry the work away. The principles of the stage Stein had spent a lifetime working out remain in control; they do so subtly, without overshadowing other elements in the play. Emotion or no, the play must remain a "continuous present." Stein uses an obvious, perhaps naive, device to achieve this. The historical periods are mixed to create a new, historically timeless present; thus John Adams, Virgil Thomson, Lillian Russell and Susan B. Anthony live together on the same stage. This mixing of periods has, perhaps because of its obviousness, been the most commented on aspect of the "continuous present" in the play. Sutherland, however, discusses the significance of this device as it relates to the entire question of time in twentieth-century writing:

Such trick time schemes usually involve the actual historical present as the basic term played against a remote past, as with A Connecticut Yankee, or a remote future, as with The Time Machine, but they do not really get away from progressive history as understood by the 19th century. It has in a way been the mission of the 20th century to destroy progressive history and create a single time in which everything in the past and possibly the future would be simultaneous. Proust and Joyce both did it in their ways and Gertrude Stein did it in her way. This time which one might call legendary time, is the time of the composi-

tion, or rather within the composition, within the Proustian novel, and within Finnegan's Wake. In the plays of Gertrude Stein of course it is the stage present.²

Other critics are somewhat more determined to see Stein's use of characters as fixing a mood that indicates time. So Brinnan writes of the playwright: "Gertrude Stein had come out of the depths of the nineteenth century and her last and most eloquent utterance glowed with her pleasure, and even love, for all that she had spent a lifetime escaping."³ Such a return "home" is doubtlessly very touching. And, in a literary age of circular novels and plays that are inclosed spaces, of Exile's Return, a life that forms a circular pattern appeals to our sense of order. But in Stein's case such a life-movement is quite simply false. All that is the nineteenth century in The Mother of Us All is the historical context (which enters very little into the play) of the issues for which Susan B. Anthony fights. The larger context of those issues, Stein evidently feels, is still very much with us. The historical issues are not central to the play; the image of the woman knowing her own nature and human nature, of doing what must be done, the image really of Gertrude Stein in the world of literature, is the central concept of the play. That concept is timeless; it is "stage present." The presentation of it in a "continuous present" is achieved by Stein's literary explorations

which, in The Mother of Us All, reach a new synthesis with what had been accepted in theatre experience; there is no retreat to the nineteenth century.

Stein states the impossibility of returning and, at the same time, the possibility of a "continuous present": "We cannot retrace our steps, going forward may be the same as going backwards" (87). She herself realizes the barrier to returning to an earlier century. But, in plays that posit an inclosed space, plays that are landscapes, circular plays (which differ from a circular creative pattern governing an artist's life), going forward or backward will eventually bring one to the same point. That point is the "present" and the impossibility of moving without arriving at it makes it "continuous." Thus Stein's "insistence," dubbed "repetition" by her critics, is a "going backwards" that is the same as "going forward" and so keeps us in the "continuous present."

This device of "insistence" which Stein had made central to Three Lives and which appeared in the very first of her plays still functions strongly in this, her last. Here, however, it is more subtly varied than in the earlier plays. The "insistence" itself creates the circle, the inclosed space that is the play, but modulations of that "insistence," modulations based on Stein's fascination with verbs and

prepositions, with rhyme and melody, with contrapuntal voices, create a movement within that circle which, in this play, is a conceptual and emotional, as well as a visual and aural, movement. Thus, the opening line of the play, the paradoxical "Pity the poor persecutor" (52), is reiterated at intervals throughout the play. Stein's love of "mistaken" words increases the meanings of the phrase, moving it forward, even though repetition itself is a backward movement: "Pity the poor persecutor because the poor persecutor always gets to be poor" (52). This phrase, or parts of it, is reasserted in different contexts throughout the play as a sort of theme line. Thus, in a short story interlude, Susan B. speaks of men, the persecutors she fights, in these same terms: ". . .poor things said Susan B. I do not pity them. Poor things. Yes said Anne they are poor things. Yes said Susan B. they are poor things. They are poor things said Susan B. men are poor things. Yes they are said Anne. Yes they are said Susan B. and nobody pities them. No said Anne no, nobody pities them" (60). In Act II, Constance Fletcher responds to John Adams' overtures of love with "What a pity, no not what a pity it is better so, but what a pity what a pity it is what a pity" (62). The theme of men as persecutors becomes tied to the problem of identity which, in Stein's theory, is, in its turn, linked with the question of the reality

of money: "Is money money or isn't money money" (52). Money introduces the theme of identity, the two having become united for Stein in much earlier writings: "It is funny about money. And it is funny about identity. You are you because your little dog knows you, but when your public knows you and does not want to pay for you and when your public knows you and does want to pay for you, you are not the same you."⁴ These two themes then, the relation of the persecutor to the persecuted ("the persecutor always ends by being persecuted" [52]) or of men to women and, more centrally, the question of identity, form a subject matter for The Mother of Us All. They are shaped, are contained within an inclosed space, by a still unceasing application of the techniques Stein has employed in earlier plays to create a verbal landscape.

Act I, Scene 1 opens with Stein's usual militancy against our accepted forms of repetition—metre and rhyme:

Daniel Webster. He digged a pit, he digged it deep
 he digged it for his brother.
 Into the pit he did fall in the pit
 he digged for tother. (53)

Rhyme is parodied in ungrammatical use of verbs and contractions, but, at the same time, is used contrapuntally against the "continuous present" speech of the other characters. Hence its repetition later in the scene. This

counterpoint between the speeches of Daniel Webster and those of Susan B. Anthony and her followers forms the major dialogue, or, more accurately, the two parallel monologues, of the play. G. S.⁵ picks up the counterpoint, incorporating the past in the present, and repeating through a playful use of words ("bear," "bearded"), in a very different sort of poetry:

G. S. My father's name was Daniel, Daniel
 and a bear, a bearded Daniel,
 not Daniel in the lion's den not
 Daniel, yes Daniel my father had
 a beard my father's name was Daniel,
Daniel Webster. He digged a pit. . . . (53)

Susan B. Anthony introduces the theme of identity more concretely:

 . . . Susan B. Anthony is my name, a
 name can only be a name my name can
 only be my name, I have a name, Susan
 B. Anthony is my name, to choose a
 name is feeble.
Indiana Elliot. . . . What's in a name.
Susan B. Anthony. Everything. (53)

This is reminiscent of Stein's meditations on poetry and grammar. She had concluded that nouns were dull because names were known and, therefore, uninteresting. But the function of poetry was to name, or better, to re-name, from an inner knowledge of the thing seen. It is this paradox that Susan B. has expressed. The scene ends with the same parody of rhyme which opened it, creating the

inclosed space of the landscape which we have viewed from the perspective of a number of characters.

Scene II begins with a very different use of rhyme:

Jo the Loiterer. I want to tell
 Chris the Citizen. Very well
 Jo the Loiterer. I want to tell oh hell.
 Chris the Citizen. Oh very well.
 Jo the Loiterer. I want to tell oh hell I want to tell
 about my wife. (54)

One of Stein's simplest devices for creating a "continuous present" works here; the name of the speaker is also made the object of the previous speech by an omission of terminal punctuation. Thus the two speeches go on simultaneously. But more important to the passage is the use of rhyme, not to make us remember, as, for example, in nursery-rhymes, but to interrupt us, to make us start again. Significantly, rhyme used in this way tends to assume the rhythms of common speech. Later Jo relates the story of his life. We have noted earlier how Stein felt she shared a problem in common with the cinema: when dialogue was introduced into the movie it became impossible to escape the sequential time of narrative. She attempts to break this sequential time by interrupting the narrative with digressions; thus it becomes nonsensical and each moment has to be taken for itself rather than in a sequential relationship with other moments:

. . . And was she your wife said Chris,
 yes said Jo when she was funny, How
 funny said Chris. Very funny said Jo.
 Very funny said Jo. To be funny you
 have to take everything in the kitchen
 and put it on the floor, you have to
 take all your money and all your jewels
 and put them near the door you have to
 go to bed then and leave the door ajar.
 That is the way you do when you are
 funny.

Chris the Citizen. Was she funny. (54-55)

Scene III shows Stein using the contrapuntal dialogue which comes to shape the play. The scene is once again a circle, an inclosed space of landscape which we see from two perspectives. It opens with the minor characters trying to define a mouse and closes with their listing of their emotional responses to that same mouse, thus forming a frame about the real action of the scene. As in a picture, the frame is really unrelated to the movement inside it. The dialogue within the frame is an opposition of statements and temperaments. First one note, then the other, is struck:

Daniel Webster.	When this debate sir was to be resumed on Thursday it so happened that it would have been convenient for me to be else- where.
Susan B.	I am here, ready to be here. Ready to be where. Ready to be here. It is my habit.
Daniel Webster.	The honorable member complained that I had slept on his speech.
Susan B.	The right to sleep is given to no woman. (57)

Here there is a counterpoint of style as well as idea. It is the different manners of the two speakers, one feels,

rather than their different meanings, that causes them to miss each other in their speeches. The writings of the historical characters have quite obviously served as a basis for this scene and the later debate scene. Gertrude Stein seems to have done extensive research in order to mix her periods and to characterize styles so effectively in this play: "she exhausted the American Library in Paris and the librarian obtained more books for her from the New York Public Library."⁶ But the historicity is unified with the "continuous present" of the play. As the scene progresses, Daniel Webster's speeches come to parody official government speechmaking: "Mr. President I shall enter on no encomium upon Massachusetts she need none. There she is behold her and judge for yourselves" (58). The epigram, as well as parody, can create a "continuous present." Parody does so by taking a remark out of context, by denying it time and space. The epigram does so by giving a statement a whimsical truth, once again unrelated to time and space. Thus the use of remarks in this scene which are both epigram and parody: "The harvest of neutrality had been great, but we had gathered it all" (58). This sort of parody is posed against the very genuine quest of Susan B. Anthony to create a counterpoint that is the movement within the scene: "Do we do what we have to do or do we have to do what we do. I answer" (58). Stein's love of

prepositions and their ability to be "mistaken" is used to underline the counterpoint:

Daniel Webster. Matches and over matches.

Susan B. I understand you undertake to overthrow
me undertaking. (58)

The latter line occurs several times in the play and had evidently been in Stein's mind as a sort of pictogram of counterpoint for a number of years. In Everybody's Autobiography, representing "under" and "over" diagrammatically, instead of printing them, she writes:

. . .they get tired of feeling they are understanding and so they take pleasure in having something that they feel they are not understanding. I understand you undertake to overthrow my undertaking.

I always did like that you did it like this:

stand take to taking
I you throw my⁷

An "Interlude" of a short story defines this counterpoint in terms of opposition and compassion as Susan B. relates her perceptions of men. Act II (Scene I) returns to the peripheral issues, the word-games and associations characterizing the minor characters. Lillian Russell comments on men's quarreling and a chorus begins a cyclical chant:

A Slow Chorus. Naughty men, they quarrel so
Quarrel about what.
About how late the moon can rise.
About how soon the earth can turn.
About how naked are the stars.
About how black are blacker men.

About how pink are pinks in spring.
 About what corn is best to pop.
 About how many feet the ocean has dropped.
 Naughty men naughty men, they are always
 always quarreling. (63)

The chant creates its own inclosed space by virtue of its stylistic "insistence."

Susan B. Anthony could be said to represent the problem of identity. Her speeches nearly always penetrate to the center of the question. Those of Daniel Webster, the father of the male group in the play, serve only to confuse the question of identity, while minor characters circle around it. The latter is the case in the above passage where the causes of quarreling are ones of definition, of naming. It also is the reason behind John Adams' often repeated avowal that: "I would still kneeling have kissed both of your hands, if I had not been an Adams" (63). Identity, the name, here defines behavior.

With Scene II, the real problem of identity, the problem of death, is explored. Names are once again a form of identity:

Anne. . . .are there any other Elliots beside Indiana Elliot. It is important that I should know, very important. (64)

At this point Stein lets Susan B. interject with what is really a comment on dramaturgy:

Susan B. Should one work up excitement, or should one
 turn it low so that it will explode louder. . . .
 (64)

Stein has chosen to "turn it low" in this scene, beginning with Susan B.'s philosophical consideration of identity and working into the pathos of lost identity before letting it "explode louder" in the fight that closes the scene.

Susan B. meditates: "A life is never given for a life, when a life is given a life is gone, if no life is gone there is no room for more life, life and strife, I give my life, that is to say, I live my life every day" (64-65). The philosophy, of course, is that of The Geographical History of America: ". . .if nobody had ever died that is everybody had not died there would not be room here for anybody who is alive now."⁸ This realization is one of the differences between "human nature," which has identity, and the "human mind." The contrapuntal struggle of opposed identities which has structured earlier scenes reaches a minor climax in the chant of Jo:

Jo the Loiterer. Fight fight fight, between the nigger
 and the white.
 Chris the Citizen. And the women. (65)

This anticlimax lets the scene move on to a loss of identity. Andrew J. compares himself with bigger men to assert an identity. When Henry B. is called forward he tells us: "I almost thought that I was Tommy I almost did I almost thought I was Tommy W. but if I were Tommy

W. I would never come again, not if I could do better no not if I could do better" (66). Virgil T. questions the identity of John Adams: "Tell me are you the real John Adams. . ." (66). As Andrew J. carries on his monologue the whole question is finally allowed to "explode louder" in the physical fight which climaxes the scene. A silence follows, leading to the ultimate question of naming and identity, still unanswered:

Daniel Webster. . . .it is rare in this troubled world
to find a woman without a last name rare
delicious and troubling, ladies and
gentlemen let me present Henrietta M.
(67)

Scene III presents the counterpoint in a quieter manner. Susan B.'s articulatedness greets the "Holy gee" (68) of one of the negroes for whom she has fought. Later in the scene, it is the publicity-ridden, the V.I.P.'s, including Daniel Webster, who are contrasted with the true quest for identity Susan Anthony has come to represent:

The Three V.I.P.'s. We you see we V.I.P. very important
to any one who can hear or you can
see, just we three, of course lots
of others but just we three, just
we three we are the chorus of V.I.P.
Very important persons to any one
who can hear or can see.

Susan B. My constantly recurring thought and
prayer now are that no word or act
of mine may lessen the might of
this country in the scale of truth
and right. (68)

Such a discussion leads easily into the identity-laden question of money and Susan B.'s conclusion that there is no difference between rich and poor. The scene shifts into a meeting where Susan B., to a different intent, is echoing Daniel Webster's statement of "the harvest of neutrality": "Ladies there is no neutral position for us to assume. If we say we love the cause and then sit down at our ease, surely does our action speak the lie" (70). Daniel Webster is again the parodic counterpoint of this biblical manner; his speech is reminiscent only of "She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain When She Comes." On top of this, Susan B. once again asserts individual identity: "A crowd is never allowed but each one of you can come in" (70). The scene ends with all the characters on stage questioning the identity of the audience. By implication, the audience too is on stage:

They say.

Now we are all here there is nobody down there to hear, now if it is we're always like that there would be no reason why anybody should cry, because very likely if at all it would be so nice to be the head, we are the head we have all the bread.

.
Susan B. advancing. I speak to those below who are not there who are not there who are not there. I speak to those below to those below who are not there to those below who are not there. (72)

In terms of Susan B. Anthony's struggle, the scene signifies an end to oppression. There are no more people "below" and everyone is "the head." Thus the speeches become one of the high points of the play. But physically, in the theatre, those below are the audience. Stein has, in this scene, drawn the audience onto the stage, made it part of the stage landscape. But it no longer has any identity as audience. Susan B. gives it a new, albeit negative, identity in her last speech.

Scene V posits the problem of identity in marriage: ". . .even if they love them so, they are alone to live and die" (72). As Jo the Loiterer and Indiana Elliot prepare to be married, definition once again becomes central:

Susan B. What is marriage, is marriage protection or religion, is marriage renunciation or abundance, is marriage a stepping-stone or an end.

What is marriage.

.
I am not married and the reason why is that I have had to do what I have had to do, I have had to be what I have had to be, I could never be one of two I could never be two in one as married couples do and can, I am but one all one, one and all one, and so I have never been married to any one. (74-75)

Throughout the rest of the play, Indiana Elliot's actions seem to be indicative of the effort to remain "one," an individual, in marriage.

The remainder of the play centers on the attempt to give up identity and the impossibility of doing so. Susan B. refuses to come out of her house because "you will not vote my laws" (77), but must come because "if I do not come you will never vote my laws, come or not come it always comes to the same thing it comes to their not voting my laws. . ." (78). This scene and Scene VII exist contrapuntally. They both begin in the same manner with Susan Anthony in her house. But where the first one places Susan B.'s recognition of failure against the crowd's pleas for her appearance, the second places that same recognition against praise after her appearance. Once again, we are getting different perspectives on the same landscape. These perspectives remain an attempt to identify that landscape. "What are men," Susan B. demands and answers herself, "Men are afraid" (80). Women, on the contrary, "have not any sense of danger" (80). The movement of time in this play must be Susan B.'s struggle for suffrage and this is a movement which will change identity: ". . .having the vote they [women] will become like men, they will be afraid. . .but I will fight for the right, for the right to vote for them. . ." (81). The remainder of the scene explodes into a series of identity crises. Indiana Elliot changes her name to make it more musical but still refuses to share it with her husband and Daniel Webster comes to Susan B. demanding to

"know the false from the true" (82). Opposed to the rhythms of meaning we have found in Susan B.'s speeches, Webster's show the rhythm of style, of cliché. They become harmonious and a "continuous present" through the juxtaposing of such meaningless styles:

. . .beyond that I seek not to penetrate the veil, why should you want what you have chosen, when mine eyes, why do you want that the curtain may rise, why when mine eyes, why should the vision be opened to what lies behind, why, Susan B. Anthony fight the fight that is the fight, that any fight may be a fight for the right. . . .I say, that so long that the gorgeous ensign of the republic, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster not a stripe erased or polluted not a single star obscured. (82)

The scene once again makes a circle, an inclosed space within which the movement from one identity to another takes place. It began with Susan B. being ironic about success in face of praise; it ends with "Men and women" praising her success and Susan B., in an ironic anti-climax, appending "So successful" (83).

The final scene gives us Susan B., dead, through a memorial statue, in yet another attempt to maintain a "continuous present." The themes of the play are tied together. Women have the vote; John Adams cannot yet escape being John Adams to marry Constance Fletcher; Henrietta M., with no last name, mocks play convention by telling us, "I have never been mentioned again" (84) and Indiana Elliot has "a great deal to say about marriage"

(85). Susan B. returns to one of Stein's lifelong preoccupations, the necessity of death and marriage, two identity-erasing situations necessary if birth and room for people are to occur and permit new identities. Jo the Loiterer states the paradox of naming as opposed to real identity as he tells his wife: "You only have the name, you have not got the game" (87). The jubilation, following a pattern well established in the play, subsides into Susan B.'s questioning. Her final speech (quoted earlier)⁹ elaborates the doctrine of the "continuous present" in life and on the stage and the primacy of identity in "human nature."

The Mother of Us All is a fitting last play.

The above analysis has been mostly a matter of tracing themes, as opposed to analyses of earlier plays which have had to deal primarily with the varying techniques used to make the "continuous present." The change in analysis is indicative, I think, of a final mellowing and maturing on Stein's part. The Mother of Us All is as technically new as any of the plays. But Stein has finally been able to reconcile overt thematic statement with theatrical innovation. The result is a very new play which engages rather than shocks our sensibilities. As such, it is perhaps the most unified of her dramatic efforts.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: "What This Says is This"

The preceding examination of the plays attests to the need for a revision of the usual critical questions when we are dealing with Stein. I suspect nearly everyone writing about her work has felt this problem, for most critical studies on Stein deal with the theories she explicated in her lectures and autobiographies. Critical estimates of her more "obscure" works are few in number and, with the exception of one doctoral dissertation,¹ deal only briefly with the plays.

The critical problem with the plays is our immediate demand for their "meaning." Meaning, of course, posits a causal relationship of content and form, a relationship Stein eschewed because it introduces narration or serial time into the work of art. There is no meaning in a Stein play except that of the technique and the feeling generated by that technique itself. An attempt to give what is generally understood as "meaning" to these works results in the analysis of a particular passage, "magpies in the sky," for example, in terms of biographical detail about either the author or the character speaking. The irrelevance of such an explanation to our feeling about the passage reveals the inefficacy of the analysis. If we wish to inquire about "meaning" in a Stein play, it

seems we must expand the term; we must ask, "What do these words, placed as they are, next to one another, and these ungrammatical, repetitious, playful techniques do? How do they make us a part of their space and their 'continuous present?'"

The other problem with the plays is their lack of emotion, for so it seems to many. But because Stein chooses to create a lateral movement, a movement of time within space instead of a movement of progressive time, because her relationships within the play are ones of sound, of contact, not of causality, does not mean that she precludes emotion. It only means the emotion will be of a different sort. The emotion rises above the play, "floating up there."² It is created by tensions and contacts within the play but is freed by virtue of being unrelated to the "meanings" of words. Words are objects, for Stein. The emotion is structured by sound patterns, by a fresh contact of words, making us sense and visualize them anew. Not dictated by sense, it is more choreographed than written. As such it may be hard for us to grasp; that is not to deny its existence. I have attempted to show how that technique developed, how it gave rise to and eventually became united with emotion in the plays. We have seen how Stein began writing plays that were cubist, spatial. With the conception of the play as landscape (Four Saints in Three Acts), came a movement of time

within an inclosed space. Listen To Me is the purist result of this theory; it is a meditation on language and, therefore, is quite literally the "human mind" writing itself. All of these plays do produce an emotion although, unrelated to "subject matter," it may seem tenuous and undefinable. With The Mother of Us All, the theory has mellowed; it no longer asserts itself so strongly but unites with recognizable subject matter to produce a play, employing all Stein's techniques, in which the emotion is more readily recognizable.

One may judge Stein on her "subject matter," her "meaning," the quality of her emotion. Many have. But to understand her work, one must attempt to comprehend the application of her theories of space and time to her works. In this way, the strange style gains "meaning."

FOOTNOTES

Chapter One

¹Stein, Lectures in America, 104-105.

²These terms are used by Stein throughout The Geographical History of America.

³Stein, Composition as Explanation, 17.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 86-87.

⁶Stein, Lectures in America, 93.

⁷Ibid., 94-95.

⁸Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 283.

⁹Kracauer, Theory of Film, 107-108.

¹⁰Stein, Lectures in America, 119.

Chapter Two

¹Stein, Lectures in America, 119.

²Sutherland, Gertrude Stein, 105.

³Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 195-196.

⁴Ibid., 180. Everybody's Autobiography was written before 1937. Stein began writing plays in 1912, but had been writing novels, portraits and essays for some time (about ten years) previous to that. I think we are therefore justified in applying the term "middle writing" to A Circular Play (1920) and Objects Lie On a Table (1922).

⁵Stein, Geographical History of America, 46-47.

⁶Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 88.

⁷Stein, Geographical History of America, 141.

⁸Ibid., 147.

⁹Ibid., 115.

¹⁰Ibid., 39.

¹¹All references to A Circular Play are to Stein, Last Operas and Plays, 139-151. References will be located by means of the page number, in parentheses, inserted in the text.

¹²Regelson, "Was She Mother of Us All?", The New York Times (Nov. 5, 1967), 1,5. Punctuation of quoted material is Regelson's, not Stein's.

¹³Stein, Geographical History of America, 69.

¹⁴Ibid., 38.

¹⁵Ibid., 17.

¹⁶It is noteworthy that A Circular Play was written shortly after Tender Buttons. Allegra Stewart has been able to trace in the latter a carefully planned and elaborated etymological pattern which she posits as the structuring device of the descriptions (Gertrude Stein and the Present). Stein would seem to be still concerned with etymology as a means of creating an inclosed space in this play.

¹⁷Hence "star-gazing" which, like "stare" in this play, occurs in conjunction with a photograph in Photograph: "Star gazing. Photographs are small" (Last Operas and Plays, 152).

¹⁸Stein, Composition as Explanation, 17.

¹⁹Stein, Geographical History of America, 147-148.

²⁰Ibid., 160.

²¹Ibid., 54.

²²Stein, Lectures in America, 199.

²³Ibid., 199-200.

²⁴Wilder, Introduction to Geographical History of America, 10.

²⁵All references to Objects Lie On a Table are to Stein, Operas and Plays, 105-111. They will be located by

page numbers, in parentheses, in the text.

²⁶Stein, Geographical History of America, 202.

²⁷Quoted by Thornton Wilder in his Introduction to Four in America, v-vi.

²⁸Stein, Lectures in America, 231.

Chapter Three

¹An exception is an anonymous review entitled "Stein Opera Sung by All-Negro Cast" which appeared in The New York Times (Feb.8, 1934), 22.

²Franklin, "'4 Saints' are 33", New York Daily Mirror (Feb. 20, 1934).

³Stein, Four Saints in Three Acts. All page references to this play in this chapter will appear in parentheses in the text.

⁴Russell, Form and Intelligibility, 67.

⁵Quoted in Brinnan, The Third Rose, 325.

⁶Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 194.

⁷*Ibid.*, 154.

⁸Chapter One, 5.

⁹Stein, Lectures in America, 103-104.

¹⁰Eisenstein, Film Form, 54-55.

¹¹Stein, Lectures in America, 167.

¹²Russell, 68.

¹³Chapter One, 6.

¹⁴Stein, Lectures in America, 166.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁷One is reminded of Eliot's line in "Burnt Norton":
"Only through time time is conquered."

¹⁸Stein, Lectures in America, 131.

¹⁹Stein, Picasso, 46.

²⁰Stein, Lectures in America, 89-90.

²¹All references to Acts and Scenes in Four Saints in Three Acts are reproduced with the same inconsistencies with which they appear in the text.

²²Stein, Lectures in America, 211.

²³Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 90.

²⁴Stein, Lectures in America, 129-130.

Chapter Four

¹Stein, Composition as Explanation, 18.

²Stein, Lectures in America, 90.

³*Ibid.*, 209-246. The lecture was delivered on a 1934 American tour and was published in 1935.

⁴Stewart, Gertrude Stein and the Present.

⁵All references to Listen To Me are to Stein, Last Operas and Plays, 387-421. References will be identified by page numbers, in parentheses, in the text.

⁶Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 13.

⁷Stein, Lectures in America, 209-210.

⁸*Ibid.*, 231.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 229-230.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 235.

¹²*Ibid.*, 245-246.

- ¹³Ibid., 210.
- ¹⁴Ibid., 211.
- ¹⁵Ibid., 213-214.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 227.
- ¹⁷Ibid., 213.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 214.
- ¹⁹Ibid., 212.
- ²⁰Ibid., 211-212.
- ²¹Ibid., 220.
- ²²Ibid., 234.
- ²³Ibid., 214-220.
- ²⁴Stein, Composition as Explanation, 17.
- ²⁵Stein, Geographical History of America, 71.
- ²⁶Ibid., 72-73.

Chapter Five

¹All references to The Mother of Us All are to Stein, Last Operas and Plays, 52-88. References will be located by page numbers, in parentheses, in the text.

²Sutherland, Gertrude Stein, 132-133.

³Brinnan, The Third Rose, 400.

⁴Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 44-45.

⁵Gertrude Stein? Her father was Daniel. This, along with Susan B. Anthony's final speech, might provide evidence for the play's being an autobiographical statement. But it has theatrical existence apart from any identification of Gertrude Stein with Susan Anthony.

⁶Thomson, "How The Mother of Us All was Created", The New York Times (April 15, 1956), 7.

⁷Stein, Everybody's Autobiography, 122.

⁸Stein, Geographical History of America, 18.

⁹Quoted, Chapter Five, 81-82.

Chapter Six

¹Leach, Gertrude Stein and the Modern Theatre.

²Stein, Lectures in America, 53.

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B29928